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No to Capital Punishment

The suicide rate in Sri Lanka is one of the highest in the world. Tens of thousands have been victims of wanton killings in the name of the country, language, homeland and liberation. As if this terrible loss of life is not enough, the government has announced that it is to restore capital punishment which has remained suspended for many years.

The campaign Sri Lanka for the abolition of capital punishment was led once upon a time by persons who were not known for their progressive and liberal views. At a time when more and more countries, some even led by reactionary regimes, have abolished the death penalty, that a government ostensibly considered to comprise of many known libertarians and enlightened men and women with progressive views should have decided bring back the hangman to carry out judicial executions is indeed lamentable.

The increase in crimes of murder and drug trafficking which has to be deterred has been advanced as the reason for bringing back into vogue this barbaric practice. The "deterrence" argument has long been blasted out of court by empirical evidence. Those who commit crimes of premeditated murder, or kill people by terrorist attacks, or indulge in drug trafficking have never been deterred from those crimes merely because they fear the hangman's noose. If that were to be true, they would equally fear a sentence of imprisonment for life and deter them from committing them. But most of them carry out these crimes in the hope that they won't get caught. The fact that these abominable crimes have been on the rise in countries where capital punishment still operates, as in the case of some the states in the USA, demonstrates the utter unsustainability of the deterrence argument.

It has to be noted that miscarriage of justice occur even in countries with highly streamlined criminal judicial systems. In recent years, there have been many cases of such miscarriage of justice in the United Kingdom where convictions followed by life prison sentences for terrorist offences carried out by alleged IRA men have been set aside after many years because the evidence upon which they were initially convicted was found to be contaminated or fabricated by the investigating authorities, or new evidence emerged which rendered the conviction insupportable. In such cases, the victims of these instances of miscarriage of justice after languishing in prison for many years had the chance to go free. But had there been capital punishment, the opportunity for rectifying the judicial wrong would have been lost for ever and the innocents would have lost their lives because of the desire on the part of those who advocate capital punishment to exact revenge through a sophisticated process of judicial execution.

Capital punishment does not achieve anything positive. It is nothing other than a barbaric exercise in exacting violent revenge in terms of life itself - an eye for an eye syndrome in a much more serious form. Reintroducing the practice of such revenge-violence should not have even entered the minds of those in authority at a time when all the efforts of the government and the people should be directed at eradicating the culture of violence and intolerance that afflicts the whole fabric of Sri Lankan society today.

Theatre of War Shifts From North-East to North-West

D B S Jeyaraj

The bitter war that raged on in the North-Eastern sector of the northern mainland of Wanni has now shifted to its north-western sector. The Sri Lankan armed forces seem to have changed their plans of establishing a ground based main supply route through the heartland of the Wanni. Instead they are now attempting to do so by capturing and consolidating the roadway along the coasts of Mannar and Kilinochi districts for the purpose. This has escalated the fighting in the north-western sector of the Wanni as opposed to the earlier stage of strife in the north-eastern sector.

Interestingly this current round of fighting has been preceded by a marked shift in the military strategies adopted by both the armed forces as well as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

With the theatre of conflict shifting to the north-western sector of the northern province the protagonists themselves are revising their objectives and redefining their strategies accordingly. This has led to a rapid transformation of both the nature of the war as well the military equation on ground in this current phase of the conflict.

Ever since the government launched its major offensive named "Operation Jayasikurui (Certain Victory) on May 13th 1997 to recapture the 76 km stretch of road between Vavuniya and Kilinochi along the Jaffna-Kandy A-9 highway the LTTE mounted effective resistance through a counter-offensive named "Operation Sei Allathu Sethu Madi" (Do or Die). The significance of that resistance has been the adopting of positional warfare by the LTTE instead of depending upon its usual guerrilla type tactics alone. Instead of "melting" away in the face of an advancing army as "guerrillas" are expected to do in classical textbooks the tigers have been entrenching themselves and attempting to defend territory.

In doing so the tigers have been successful to the extent of preventing the army of reaching its avowed destination of Kilinochi yet. In spite of the protracted war described as the longest operation in South Asia the armed forces had only reached the northern town of Mankulam about 32 km to the south of Kilinochi when "Jayasikirui" was suspended last December. The 18 month battle however was the bloodiest phase in the entire war, resulting in casualties both dead and injured topping the five figure mark on either side. It is reported that the LTTE has raised three infantry (Charles Anthony, Jeyanathan, Vithusha) and one artillery (Kittu) type units to confront the army whose 53rd, 54th, 55th and 56th divisions were engaged in the Wanni theatre of conflict.

When Jayasikurui was called off it was perceived as a clear instance of the army being unable to overcome the LTTE and achieve its goal. Predictably LTTE propaganda has projected the "non-success" of the armed forces in meeting the deadline as a "defeat". The recent past however has seen an interesting transformation. The military impasse in one direction has been compensated for by the army progressing in other directions and acquiring "real estate" amounting to 670 square kilometres. What is puzzlingly noteworthy about these gains is that they did not require any fighting.

The LTTE in a seemingly change of strategy did not proffer any resistance when the army advanced.

From the inception of the present round of war Sri Lankan President and defence minister Chandrika Kumaratunga had been content to leave the management of the war to her uncle and deputy minister of defence Anurudha Ratwatte. In spite of the triumphant "victory" in Jaffna peninsula and the early successes in the Wanni, the army had been unable to maintain the same momentum subsequently. The amazing resilience of the LTTE had resulted in the army virtually getting bogged down in the quagmire of the Wanni. In the process it was sustaining very heavy losses including those of morale and prestige. There was increased criticism that this was all because of Ratwatte's single minded determination to achieve control of the A-9 highway alone instead of reviewing other less costly options.

Under these circumstances Kumaratunga had no choice other than to assert her authority and play a more decisive and direct role in the realm of defence from the last quarter of last year. Instead of leaving everything in Ratwatte's hands she was set up a joint operations bureau under retired general Rohan Daluwatte to plan and co-ordinate military action while being directly responsible to her.

After the armed forces gained control of Mankulam the government suspended the much prolonged "Jayasikurui" saying it had achieved its temporary objectives. The reality however was that the emphasis on an upward north-bound thrust towards Kilinochi had been put on hold. Instead the army conducted another limited operation named " Rivibala" (Sunpower) reminiscent of operation "Riviresa" (Sunray) that led to the LTTE getting dislodged from Jaffna.

The Jaffna-Kandy road or A-9 highway that runs through the middle of the Wanni mainland has three major roads leading eastwards to the Tiger citadel of Mullaitheevu on the north-eastern coast. These roads are from Paranthan, Mankulam, and Puliyankulam respectively. When "Jayasikurui" was suspended the army, apart from its positions along the A-9 highway, was also occupying Nedunkerny on the Puliyankulam - Mullaitheevu road and Olumadu on the Mullaitheevu -Mankulam road.

"Operation Rivibala" in December last year saw the army breaking out from the Olumadu-Karippattamurippu camp along the Mankulam-Mullaitheewu road and proceed eastwards till it reached Oddusuddan o the same road. This manoeuvre was supplemented by another column from Nedunkerny advancing towards Oddusuddan in a north-eastwards thrust.

Both lines of advance seemed to have surprised the LTTE who apparently had been structuring their defences in readiness for an upward, northbound move by the army. Apparently it did not expect the army to

progress sideways like a "crab" and take territory. The end result was the linking up of Mankulam via Olumadu to Oddusuddan along with Nedunk-- erny. This near triangular area saw the army gaining 135 square kilometres of territory easily.

There was no direct fighting but the army advance was preceded by intensive bombing and long range artillery barrages. Civilians in the region numbering over 14,000 fled from the area but another 850 people opted to take their chances with the army. They sought refuge in Oddusuddan than Thondreeswarar Sivan Kovil premises. This was another new feature as the general practice had been for Tamil Civilians to run away from areas seized by the army. Later Ratwatte escaped death when LTTE shells landed dangerously close to him when visiting the Sivan temple. A senior commander Maj-Gen Neil Dias was injured.

The suspension of "Jayasikurui" saw a reversal of roles in the military scenario that has gone largely unnoticed in the Island nation's media. It was no longer a case of the army trying to advance on predictable routes with the tigers waiting in anticipation. Now it was a case of the army embarking on unorthodox expeditions. The strategic shift, illustrated vividly by the Oddusuddan annexation, meant that the army now possessed the element of surprise. In the Wanni arena the army had the options of -

1. Going north east by east to Mullaitheevu from Oddusuddan;
2. Proceeding South by south - east to Mullaitheevu from Paranthan.
3. Resuming Jayasikurui and commencing either a northwards thrust or southwards thrust or both again
4. Reopening the north-western front and undertaking manoeuvres there.

The LTTE in its wisdom ruled out the north-western sector of the Wanni lying to the west of the A-9 highway as a potential venue for escalated conflict and instead focused on the other options. It strengthened its 40 mile long "Pathukapu Veli" (Security Fence) of entrenched positions extending from Vavunikulam in the west to Katsilaimadu in the east. It also set up positions near the Paranthan- Elephant pass axis. The LTTE may have felt that the army would target Mullaitheevu because it was in every sense the heartland of tiger territory now. The Alambil-Salai coastline was the LTTE lifeline in terms of procuring military supplies from abroad.

Also the fledgling "Vaan Puligal" (Air tigers) unit comprising a few microlite aircraft and two seater helicopters was also stationed there.

Subsequent events demonstrated that the LTTE may have made a grave miscalculation in ignoring the north-western sector or that it had some yet to be revealed tactical ace up its sleeve.

The district of Mannar along with portions of the Vavuniya and Kilinochi districts comprise the North-Western sector of the Wanni. The chief road linking Mannar and Vavuniya is the A-30 highway. This proceeds westwards from Vavuniya town to Parayanalankulam and then north-westwards to Mannar. Another road, the A-14 highway from Medawachiya to Mannar via Chettykulam also meets it and merges at Parayanlankulam.

The army had established control over the Vavuniya-Mannar roadway through another operation named "Edibala" prior to Jayasikurui being launched in 1997. The LTTE did not offer any resistance then. The Mannar-Vavuniya road was considered secure to the extent of deploying the police along that highway instead of the army stationed in interspersed camps. Apart from a rare ambush the LTTE did not attempt any significant operation to counter the Sri Lankan armed forces presence there.

From March 4th to 6th this year the government forces conducted an unusually quiet operation that was conspicuous by its secretive "silence" in striking contrast to its codename "Ranghosa" meaning "Battly Cry". The operation was a twin pronged drive from two directions towards a single destination Iranai Iluppaikulam which literally means "Twin Mahua tree Tank" and is 27 km to the north -west of Vavuniya town. This was followed by second thrust to Moondrumurippu from two directions and then an upward move to Vannivilankulam towards the north.

The army moved northwards from Poovarasankulam eight miles to the west of Vavuniya on the Vavuniya-Mannar road towards Iranaiilluppaikulam by way of a minor road that cuts through villages like Velankulam, Thirumenikulam and Periya Puliyankulam. The area was virtually a no man's land devoid of people. Six Czech built T-52 main battle tanks of the armoured corps were in the vanguard of the advancing column. The armoured thrust was followed by men of the 215 brigade led by Brigadier Saliya Kulatunga.

Simultaneously another column proceeded from Thandikulam six miles to the north of Vavuniya along another minor road also leading to Iranailluppaikulam. This road goes through places like Marukkarampalai, Shastrikoolankulam, Kalmadu and Thavasiyakulam etc. This line of advance too met with no resistance. It comprised men from the 214 brigade led by Colonel Kumar Herath. Even more notable was the virtual absence of landmines on the way. The people of Iranailluppaikulam were surprised to wake up one fine morning and find the army amidst them. There had been absolutely no firing of any kind. Their surprise increased when they found the LTTE "pass" issuing office closed and a woman Tiger camp nearby deserted. Obviously the LTTE had anticipated army arrival and faded away.

Upon reaching Iranailluppaikulam and tarrying for a "breather" the army had moved northwards again passing through villages like Vilaathikulam, Valaiankaddu, Periyamadhu etc and reached Moondrumurippu. Likewise another column started out from Omanthai, ten miles to the north of Vavuniya town and proceeded northwestwards to Moondrumurippu along a gravel track cutting through jungle areas and villages like Rambaikulam, Kondakkaarankulam, Palamoddai, Navvi, Panichankulam, Koliyakulam etc.

Again there was no resistance. After reaching Moondrumurrippu both columns of the army continued northwards via Pandiyankulam and reached Vannivilankulam to the northwest of Mankulam. Later the Mankulam axis was extended to Vannivilankulam.

Now the army is poised to move through Vavunikulam and then Thunukkai and Mallavi the two most important towns in the north-west sector. Mallavi incidentally was the place where the inter-religious delegation from Colombo met the LTTE re-

cently. The LTTE leaders Karikalan and Thamilchelvan had stated to the Buddhist and Christian priests that the Tigers were prepared to enter peace negotiations. Expectations of peace that arose as a result were rudely shattered by the new army operation. In fact the army had proceeded at least some of the way along the route taken by the peace delegation. Some Colombo correspondents could hardly conceal their glee when they reported that the government had shattered possibilities for peace negotiations by the military operation.

In terms of territorial acquisition operation battle cry was a great "success" as it resulted in a further 570 sq. kilometres area coming under army control. This consisted of jungles and agricultural fields in 24 villages coming under 17 grama sevaka divisions. With this all lands in Vavuniya district except one division (Periya Thambanai) have come under government control. Thus in two operations sans fighting the Sri Lankan army had brought under its domain 670 sq. km of new territory. What is most puzzling about this is the marked absence of LTTE resistance. It was a virtual cakewalk for the army.

Over 9000 civilians have opted to remain in the areas captured by the army instead of fleeing like another 15,000 displaced persons. An immediate benefit was the availability of essential goods at cheap prices. Ratwatte sought to gain much propaganda mileage out of it. Iranailluppaikulam is a key intersection in the northwestern sector. Several roads cut through the place. Also it was the main transit point in one direction for people crossing to an from government controlled areas into LTTE controlled areas.

Government sources attributed the army success to the factor of surprise.

LTTE circles however indicated in their media organs abroad that the LTTE had allowed the army in so that it can be encircled and attacked later.

Yet there has been no effective counter attack by the Tigers so far. The only two incidents so far in the newly seized areas was an ambush on an army convoy that was inspecting the LTTE cemetery of over 1000 "Maaveerar (Great heroes) in the Thavasiyakulam-Kalmadu area. Four men including an intelligence official died. The other was a lobbing of grenades on a sentry post in the Moondrumurippu area.

It does seem clear however that the change of strategies by both sides provide much food for thought. The army instead of focusing on opening the A-9 highway alone is now diversifying its advances in different directions and accumulating a great deal of real estate in the process.

The LTTE on the other had has not resisted these manoeuvres and allowed the army to march and conquer. Acquiring territory also means that the army will spread thin in trying to consolidate it and become increasingly vulnerable. This could amount to the Tigers attacking isolated army detachments in the near future. At the same time it cannot be denied that the army does have the resilience to maintain its presence despite suffering tremendous onslaughts by the LTTE.

Anuruddha Ratwatte speaking in Parliament about the recennt successes was once again on an upbeat ebullient mood. After riding his hobbyhorse of boasting about the percentage of territory recaptured from the LTTE, Ratwatte also proclaimed that the main supply route to Jaffna by land would be opened soon. The ill-fated Jayasikurui's avowed objective was to establish such a ground route by capturing and consolidating the Jaffna-Kandy road. Ratwatte's comments however led to speculation that he was hinting at another strategic shift regarding plans to open a ground link to Jaffna. It was clear that the recent successes had thrown open that possibility afresh.

Before Jayasikurui was launched there had been some doubt as to what path the army proposed to take in achieving the target of establishing a ground route. In terms of cost analysis it seemed prudent for the army to pursue a roundabout but safer route along the North-Westerns coasts. Already the roadway up to Mannar was under army control. The next stage would have been to gain control of the Mannar -Pooneryn road of A-32 highway that hugs the North-Western coast. From Mannar-Thalaldi this road goes along Pappamottai, Pallamadhu, Iluppaikkadavai, Vellankulam, Mulankavil, Nachikudu, Pallavarayankattu etc to Pooneryn or Poonagari. Thereafter the linkage with the Jaffna peninsula could be achieved by either extending links to Elephant Pass via Kilinochi-Paranthan or by re-establishing the Pooneryn ferry (or constructing the Mahadeva causeway) between Kerathivu and Sangupiddy. Though long winded this route hugging the coast was easier to establish and safeguard than the A-9 going through thick jungle in the centre of the Wanni.

The ambitious Ratwatte preferred to take the harder path. After Jayasikurui began speculation about this route ceased. After the army abandoned Pooneryn and was later driven away from Kilinochi it seemed that this route was no longer an option. But with the significant strides made in the North-Western sector this vague probability became a distinct possibility again. The capture of the strategically located Iranailluppaikulam has enabled the army to mount pressure on the LTTE from different directions.

Soon the airforce began bombing the Pooneryn area. Then the army broke out of the Thallady camp and reached Pappamottai on the Pooneryn road without any resistance. Realising perhaps that the army was bent on taking the entire roadway the Tigers began striking back. Long range heavy artillery was swiftly moved to Naayaaruveli on the same road from where a barrage was unleashed on the army. Several years ago Naayaaruweli was the target range for the army in Thallady. The artillery used by the LTTE for the first time in Mannar is Multi-barrel rocket launchers (MBRL).

The Thallady camp us the headquarters of the 21st brigade with Maj Gen Shantha Kottegoda in Command. The LTTE scored significantly when shells fell on the Thallady camp ammunition dump. At least 24 soldiers were killed and 42 injured in the chain reaction of explosions. The camp sustained great damage and a great fire erupted. The fire raged for two days destroying a substantial portion of the Thallady premises including its storage facilities. At least nine vehicles were gutted. The army advance along the Pooneryn road was temporarily halted. It also appears that the Tigers are now assembling cadres along this

route in anticipation of an army advance. The people of the area have started moving out.

The army however commenced another forward moving operation in a different direction. The most famous Catholic shrine in Sri Lanka is situated at Maruthamadhu popularly known as Madhu in Mannar district. Nominally it is a Fatima church dedicated to out lady of the rosary (Sebamaalai Matha) but is generally know as Our Lady of Madhu or "Madhu Maatha Church". In recent times a colony of displaced persons numbering nearly 15,000 has been set up in the areas surrounding it and is under UNHCR supervision. The road to Madhu begins on the Madhu road junction on the Mannar-Vanunniya highway that is controlled by the army. With Thallady coming under artillery fire by the LTTE the army commenced an operation on this road and started proceeding towards Madhu. Once again the Tigers retaliated and fired rocket propelled grenade mortars killing one and wounding three soldiers. But the Tiger resistance did not prevent the army from bringing under its control the Madhu area including the church which is regarded as a major loss for the LTTE.

.Another outcome of the Mannar-Pooneryn road coming under army control would be the possible curtailment of the clandestine marine contact between the Tamil Nadu and Mannar coasts. It is no secret that the Tigers have in recent times been procuring medicine, fuel, newsprint, non-perishable foodstuffs, mechanical and electronic spare parts etc from Tamil Nadu through smugglers and some fishermen. Some arrests have been made in this regard. This contraband is stored in the Sea Tiger base at Nachikudah on the littoral and then distributed to other tiger points in the hinterland. If the coastal road is taken by the army then the clandestine traffic between Tamil Nadu and Mannar coasts would be interdicted effectively.

Thus all indications are that the theatre of war in the Wanni has shifted from the north-east to the north-west. It remains to be seen as to what manoeuvres will be undertaken by both sides in pursuance of their military objectives. ●

Confronting 'the Billo'

Religious Leaders Meet the LTTE

Lakshman Gunasekera

One sunny afternoon earlier this month, in a jungle hideout of one of the world's fiercest insurgent armies, a group of frail, elderly, holy men and younger fellow ascetics confronted some of the top commanders of that army and told them off in no uncertain terms.

"We pointed out to them the trauma suffered by the people in the South due to the attack on Anuradhapura and the bombing of the Dalada Maligawa," the Venerable Professor Kumburugamuve Vajira told a news conference in Colombo on February 12th in describing the February 10th meeting between the delegation of senior Buddhist and Christian clergy and two key top-rankers of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). "We told them that these attacks only made more difficult our own task of creating a better understanding in the South of the concerns of the Tamil people and the need for a settlement of this war."

The Tigers, according to one of the delegation, had been caught unawares by the unexpected admonition by their ecclesiastical visitors and had apparently assured the delegation that, on their part, an effort would be made to avoid destruction of, or damage to, any religious site or shrine. (Can we trust those Tiger terrorists? Will they go back on their word given to the Sadhus?)

The Ven. Prof. Vajira led the delegation of clergy from the South including some of the country's most senior Buddhist and Christian religious leaders which, during February 8 -10, visited the LTTE-controlled Vanni region. They were sent by the Inter-Religious Alliance for National Unity (Jaathika Samagiya Udesaavuu Aagamika Sandhaanaya) on a mission to visit these war-ravaged areas, meet the civilian population, especially the most severely affected groups such as the refugees displaced by the conflict, and to communicate to the people of the South the conditions of the Vanni population and the concerns and aspirations expressed by them. 'From the South' and 'to the South' signified that the delegation was, in effect, representative of the religious leadership of the Sinhala people.

The Delegations

What was truly historic about the meeting between the religious delegation and the LTTE was the very fact that it was a meeting between the two immediate deputies of Liberation Tiger leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, on the one hand and, on the other, the deputy heads of two major Buddhist sects and senior prelates of the two largest Christian sects in Sri Lanka.

On the side of the LTTE was Mr. Karikalan, chief of political affairs, and Mr. Thamilchelvam, deputy military commander. The 'big guns' of the religious delegation were the Ven. Udugama Buddharakkhitha Nayaka Thera, Anunayaka of the Asgiriya Chapter of the Siyam Nikaya, Ven. Thalalle Dhammaloka Nayaka Thera, Anunayaka of the Amarapura Nikaya, the Rt. Rev. Malcolm Ranjith, Roman Catholic Bishop of Ratnapura and Secretary-General of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka and, the Rt. Revd. Kenneth Fernando, Anglican Bishop of Colombo. The Ven. Prof. Vajira, former Vice Chancellor of the Buddhism and Pali University and an internationally respected Buddhist scholar, headed the delegation in his capacity as moderator of the Inter-Religous Alliance.

If the LTTE is at the centre of the Tamil struggle for self-determination and embodies (in more than one sense of that term - including the self-sacrificial) the Tamil spirit of sovereign identity and autonomy, the Buddhist Saasana is a core icon of the Sinhala nationalist spirit. The classical political-historical role attributed to the Sangha in the sustaining of the Sinhala monarchy over the centuries,

as well as the traditional recognition of the monks as those who possess the purest form of pronunciation of Hela Basa, are both powerful pointers to the symbolic and political significance of the saffron community.

It is not the first time that Buddhist and/or Christian clergy of the Sinhala community have travelled North to meet and exchange views with representatives of Tamil nationalist militancy. This writer remembers being a (junior) part of a delegation of Sinhala Buddhist and Christian students and young clergy which visited Jaffna in the immediate aftermath of the anti-Tamil riots of 1977 (which occurred as part of the UNP's violent celebrations of its massive election victory). The Student Christian Movement, whose membership included both Sinhala and Tamil Christian students, was the facilitator of that meeting. However, it was the fact that the Colombo-based SCM already had a record of being sensitive to the problems of ethnic minorities and had gone as far as recognising the right of self-determination that gave that organisation the credibility to act as intermediary with Tamil militants who were gradually becoming suspicious of the Sinhalas.

The Role of the Church

Over the past two decades of gradual deterioration of relations between the Sinhala and Tamil communities, Christian/Catholic institutions have often played this role of inter-ethnic facilitator, precisely because of their demographic advantage of straddling both Sinhala and Tamil communities. These institutions were also well positioned to provide the necessary logistical resources because they have a lot of money as compared to the Hindu and Buddhist ecclesiastical structures. In fact, in some of these exercises, the Church and the Christian clergy involved have chosen to remain in the background and merely provide the logistical support in order that the Buddhist Sinhala elements have the opportunity to be in the forefront and directly interact with the Tamil nationalist activists both civilian and militant.

It must be said, however, that much of this initiative in the past has been by small, religiously committed elements within the Church structures and has been often undertaken notwithstanding the lethargy and lack or support (sometimes downright hostility) of the Church hierarchy.

Equally importantly, it was the decades of hard work of these committed elements in social action in solidarity with grass roots struggles of both Sinhala and Tamil workers and peasants irrespective of religious affiliation which has resulted in the build-up of confidence between Christians on the one hand and non-Christians who have naturally been suspicious of the colonial and neo-colonial legacy of the Sri Lankan Church. It is this record of identification with the masses of oppressed people by these radical Christian social activists that has, in more recent years, given the Church as a whole the kind of socio-cultural credibility it now enjoys among the non-Christian population and religious institutions. The Christian hierarchy today, both Catholic and Protestant, owes whatever credibility it has in the area of social justice to the early activism of those elements.

Taking the Lead

But who took the lead in the most recent venture by clergy into the battlegrounds of the North? The Nayaka Theras did. "It was their idea," one Bishop who was in the delegation told me. "They wanted to go. Some of the senior bhikkhus decided that it was time they went North and saw things for themselves and learnt from it."

The principal logistics organiser for the arduous overland journey across wild, war-torn country was one of the younger monks, the Ven. Kalupahane Piyaratana, already known for his committed peace activism together with the National Peace Council. He told me that it was one of the senior monks hired the mini bus for the trip from Colombo to Madhu and back. A decade ago, Bhikkus wanting to visit the North would not have had the seniority to easily mobilise a mini bus for such a dangerous journey, nor would they have had easy access to such resources. Even the pictorial record of the visit was made by two of the younger monks who took cameras along. Unfortunately, the lack of a co-ordinated follow-up the organisations that supported the visit has delayed the availability to the public of pictures of this historic visit.

Today, partly as a result of their gradual recovery from colonial oppression and partly as a result of the support received from an ethno-centric State as well as from the richer Buddhist countries (such as Japan and Korea), both the Sangha and Buddhist laity are now able to mobilise more resources. The growing affluence and social power of non-Christian social classes has provided the Sasana with lay constituencies possessing a better capacity to support the Sangha community. This is already being reflected in the multitude of creative initiatives taken by the Sangha and by lay Buddhist organisations in diverse areas ranging from drug rehabilitation and trauma counselling to protecting the environment and indigenous culture and technology, to support for numerous causes of social justice.

While there have always been cases of individually active bhikkhus, in more recent years, however, the Buddha Sasana has been showing a greater and greater organised response to the ethnic conflict entirely on its own initiative; that is, responding in a more complex and creative manner than simply lending itself to the machinations of the Sinhala-Buddhist supremacist State.

Significant Journey

The reality is that, precisely because it is the religion of the majority of the population and of the dominant civilisation on this island, it is the Buddha Sasana that has the greatest capacity to respond creatively to the current crisis in our island society. Thus it is not surprising that the visit to the North by the delegation from the Inter-Religious Alliance for National Unity was entirely the initiative of the senior bhikkhus who hold leadership positions in that Alliance. The fact that some of the monks were frail ascetics in their seventies and sixties but were neverthless prepared to endure not merely the risk of violence in the war zone, but also the physical rigours of fast overland travel along jungle roads and roads neglected and damaged after years of war, made this journey all the more significant.

As the Ven. Piyaratana told me: "We felt that this was the time to visit the war-affected Tamil population and see for ourselves their conditions. It is true that it was very tiring and tense.

But I think even the older Svaaminvahansa did not feel the strain too much because we were all so inspired by the importance of our mission. The suffering we saw that the refugees were undergoing also made us realise that our travel hardships were only temporary."

Hardship it must have been for these clerics to traverse about three hundred miles of wilderness and war zone in just three days.

The delegation comprised 17 bhikkhus, the two Bishops and Prof. Tissa Vitarana, the convenor of the National Alliance for Peace. Several of the senior monks in the delegation were also in leadership positions of the National Alliance for Peace.

They left Colombo early in the morning of February 8th and, after a lunch stop in Anuradhapura, reached the Catholic Shrine at Madhu at about 5 p.m. that day. They were now well inside the LTTE-controlled territory. They found a large crowd that had been waiting several hours to welcome them to the shrine. The Catholic Bishop of Mannar had made arrangements for their reception in Madhu and was also the liaison between the delegation and the LTTE.

Praying for Peace at Shrine

The clerics celebrated their arrival in the LTTE-held Vanni with the conducting of a Peace service at the Shrine that night. This was the first time that Bhikkhus had participated in religious observances at the Shrine. The next morning comprised a series of visits to schools in the area and meetings with students and teachers. In the afternoon there were meetings with government officials in the area including the Additional Government Agent and the health officers. The evening was occupied with visits to some of the many refugee camps in the vicinity of the Shrine. The monks recalled how refugee children, who had never before seen a bhikkhu, came up to them and wonderingly touched their saffron robes. The adult refugees seemed overwhelmed by the fact that these elderly prelates had undertaken so hard a journey to visit them in their predicament.

One would have thought that the whole day's accumulation of the experience of human suffering as well as the strain of travelling in the hot, Dry Zone jungle conditions would have been enough for anybody. Perhaps that may have been why the delegation found the 'Saama Bhaavanaa' they conducted in the Madhu Church that night so inspiring!

After the meditations in the Church, the Buddhist clergy, on their own initiative, performed satyakriya for peace and unity in front of the Shrine. The religious observances were attended by a large number of refugees from the nearby camps.

On the 10th monring the delegation set off across the Vanni to Mallaavi, some eight miles east of Kilinochchi, in the Mullaitivu district. Because the roads were so bad and also because of the need for quick recognition in the war zone for security reasons, the delegation travelled in a bus provided by the LTTE.

Were not these gentle clerics fearful of a possible attack by any SLAF plane that might spot their vehicle and could legitimately strike at any suspected enemy vehicle? "We were aware of that risk but our minds were focussed on our mission. We were already absorbed with what we had seen and heard and experienced during our first day in the Vanni," the Ven. Piyaratana recalls.

Meeting the LTTE

The delegation arrived in the hamlet of Mallaavi at about 11 a.m. was received by the LTTE in a small building set apart from the rest of the settlement. Members of the delegation recall it as a well maintained guest house. They were received by Messrs Karikalan, Thamilchelvam, Viduran and Purithavan. There were a number of other civilian Tiger officials present. Alert as they were for the peculiarities of the battleground, the clerics did not see any guns. In fact the only uniform the observant Ven. Piyaratana saw was that of a LTTE policeman (or should I say police-boy?) in the Mallaavi settlement.

The monks, none of whom had visited LTTE installations before, were impressed by the standard of the facilities and the scale of the Tigers' insitutional infrastructure. "We saw police officers and an 'Eelam' district courthouse," Ven. Piyaratana said.

They were also briefed on life under LTTE rule by representatives of local citizens' organisations who had come (been brought?) for the occasion. However, the key activity of the day was the one hour of discussions with Messrs Karikalan and Thamilchelvam. After the initial exchange of pleasantries, there was a sharing of views between the two sides on the events and processes that have drawn the country into the abyss of civil war.

There seems to have been considerable agreement between the two sides concerning the suffering Sri Lankans of all commmunities have had to undergo because of the war. The religious leaders were quite impressed by the manner in which the Tiger leaders referred to the war as something which was destroying the country and need to be ended soon.

No doubt, as with many of their lay Sinhala counterparts in the South, the Bhikkus had a vision of the Tigers as some awful, bloodthirsty beings bent on destruction and domination (of Hela Diva). The ability of the LTTE to suddenly strike and disappear recalls the supernatural billo which are the stuff of Sinhala horror tales. Billo is derived from the historical memory of the ferocious invaders from across Palk Straits. The term billo invokes images similar to that of the Norse berserkers who put parts of coastal Britain to the sword in their successive campaigns of pillage and plunder across the North Sea. "Onna Babo, billo enavaa!" is a common invocation in Sinhala childhood.

So in February 1999, after nearly twenty years of bitter warfare and, according to mainstream Sinhala perceptions, atrocities against the Sinhalas, the terroristic slaughter of 'innocents' especially monks, and the forcing of political concessions from the Sri Lankan (read Sinhala) State, at last the Sangha, who are the protectors of the Sinhalas, have gone in force to meet the billo.

Talking with the 'Enemy'

The actions of meeting and dialogue undertaken by the delegation, however, is the reverse of military confrontation. Rather than fighting the 'enemy', the spiritual-intellectual core of the Sinhala Being is now talking to them; discovering them, learning from them. This can only help in a re-adjustment of attitudes concerning the 'enemy'.

It was the enemy which cared for the elderly prelates on February 10th; reminding them at ten minutes to

noon that it was time for their daana. It was the Tiger leaders who personally served the Nayaka Theras their meal and then sat down with them to eat and chat.

No doubt all this is excellent propaganda for the LTTE. The LTTE's video crew (the same which videoed the gory details of Tiger attacks?) was present to record the meeting with the religious leaders. The record is probably already being distributed worldwide. But that is inevitable. Just as much as the State and various other political groups will either praise or criticize the visit by the delegation.

What is crucial is the effect of the visit on the LTTE representatives, on the Tamil refugees, on the religious delegation and also on the Sri Lankan public in general. The significance of the Nayaka Theras' visit to the Vanni and, in particular, their meeting with the LTTE top-rankers, is three-fold.

Firstly, the very act of senior (Sinhala) Buddhist ecclesiastical leaders going to the North to visit the war-affected Tamil population is an action done in front of the (Buddhist) Sinhala community; a kind of demonstration of concern (maithriya) by the Sasana and a political intervention of sorts by the Sangha community.

Secondly, the effect of this visit and meeting with the LTTE on the Sangha leaders themselves is critical as it will to some degree alter their own perceptions of the conflict and the possibilities of overcoming it.

Thirdly, the experience of the visit to the Vanni will influence subsequent actions by the Sangha. It will colour the communications between the Sangha and its constituency which is the Buddhist Sinhala community. In effect then, the visit will have a bearing on the future spiritual leadership that the Sangha gives to that community.

One visit alone will not bring about radical change. The experience of the visit needs to be communicated and shared among the communities of the South. The lessons learnt must be preached through bana and from the pulpit. However, this action by some Sangha leaders will surely change the Sasana. For too long has the Sasana been trapped by the politics of the post-colonial State and by the compulsions of modernist 'development'.

It is time that the Sangha recovers its central role in Sri Lankan society. The Sasana must recover its symbolic power - its core function as the spiritual centre of the Sinhala nationalist impetus and not the idol of the ultra-nationalist enterprise. But not just of the nationalist impetus. The Sangha has to become immersed in the life of Sri Lankan society in general as it has done in the past. It cannot go back to a mythical past. It can only attempt to live in the here and now; to respond to the needs of Life today.

To do that it must no longer remain a mere 'graven image' for the Sinhala ultra-nationalist cause - a mere tool of politicians and interest groups. It has the challenging task of ridding Sinhala consciousness of the maya of ethnic domination and 'empire'. ●

The Noose Again!

Cat's eye

Every few years we get headlines in the newspapers announcing the possible restoration of capital punishment in Sri Lanka. Arguments are used about the horrifying increase of murder and the need for the death penalty as a deterrent. One issue that divides most liberals, progressives, socialists, feminists and human rights activists, authoritarians, right-wing hard liners etc. is the question of capital punishment, namely the State's legal right to execute, i.e. to take a person's life by methods including hanging, the guillotine, electrocution, lethal injection or the firing squad. It is also an issue that today divides the more civilised states from those that still practise barbaric customs of the past. Even within the USA, some federal states do not resort to capital punishment, while the more backward ones - especially in the South and South West still celebrate their commitment to the death penalty - even when it involves citizens of other countries, as in the recent execution in Arizona of two brothers with German citizenship.

Feminist politics usually takes a stand against capital punishment, not merely because women create life and do not want to destroy it, but because feminists know that revenge by the state is no deterrent and that, as Bernard Shaw has reminded us, "murder and capital punishment are not opposites that cancel one another out but similars that breed their own kind". Or to quote a more mundane, but relevant source, the official hangman in the UK for 25 years up to 1956, Albert Pierrepoint, who in his biography said: "I do not believe that any of the hundreds of executions I carried out in any way acted as a deterrent aga-inst murder. Capital punishment achi-eved nothing except revenge".

Deterrence or Revenge?

The deterrence argument is, of course, most popular among advocates of capital punishment and as Dr. Hugh Bedau has noted is based "on wish, not fact". He claimed that in the USA, "death penalty states" rather than having lower homicide, had rates two or three times higher than the "non-penalty states". And in Britain, the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment (1953), revealed that the abolition of the death penalty does not lead to an increase in homicide, nor does its restoration lead to a fall. To the argument that public executions (as still practised in some countries) are a deterrent, a Commission in the UK in 1868 (when public hanging was stopped) revealed that of the 167 persons sentenced to death in a town, 161 had already witnessed a public execution.

The Sri Lanka Case

Donovan Moldrich's excellent book "Hangman - Spare that Noose" (published in 1983) records the history of the abolition movement in Sri Lanka. In both pre-colonial and colonial times capital punishment was prevalent, Opposition to the practice grew because many instances were reported of innocent persons being executed as a result of perjury, false allegations and mistaken identity.

Moldrich notes that the first attempt at abolition was in the Legislative Council, in 1928, when a motion

by D. S. Senanayake, seconded by Baron Jayatilake, to abolish the death penalty, was passed by 19 votes to 7, but was ignored by the Colonial Office in London. In the State Council of the 1930s and 1940s further attempts were made by Susantha de Fonseka (1936) and Dr. A. P. de Zoysa (1942), both being rejected by the elected state councillors.

In the post-independence years, the question came up again, especially in the Buddha Jayanthi year (1956) when Dr. G. P. Malalasekera called for the abolition of the death penalty and in parliament, Fred de Silva in March 1956, successfully proposed life imprisonment as a substitute for hanging.

In 1956 when S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike led a People's United Front to a massive victory at the elections, one of the first decisions of the cabinet was to suspend the operation of the death penalty. The Minister of Justice M. W. M. de Silva described capital punishment as a "survival of a rather primitive social state" and referred to the fact that most murders in Sri Lanka were unpremeditated and committed on sudden provocation. The bill was presented in parliament by Mahanama Samaraweera (as the Minister of Justice in the Senate) who recalled that over 30 countries had already abolished capital punishment and that the UK had suspended it for 5 years. The enactment of the Act suspending the death penalty was widely welcomed. Dr. N. M. Perera referred to it as a "most progressive step" and Dr. Colvin R de Silva said: "The men who normally come as murderers in our courts never contemplated either the killing or the death penalty".

The Act provided for a trial period of 3 years and S W R D Bandaranaike stated that he hoped that its working would "justify the abolition of the death penalty after this period." But ironically it was Bandaranaike's assassination in 1958 that led to the restoration of capital punishment. In subsequent years, motions by private members for abolition were unsuccessful. Hangings resumed, but the campaign for abolition also continued and the Sri Lanka Committee for the Abolition of the Death Penalty was formed in 1977, which stated that "the time for a return to the suspension of the death penalty is now ripe."

From June 1976, no execution has taken place and the policy of invariable commutation commenced by J R Jayewardene was followed by all subsequent Presidents.

In July 1995 the UN Human Rights Committee noted its satisfaction "at the government's stated policy of not implementing death sentences."

The Noose Again?

But again, the "hanging lobby" has reared its ugly head, and politicians are succumbing to hysteric calls for the death penalty. The government which always lauds the human face of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, and whose Ministers today include persons known for their enlightened liberal views, seem to be flying a kite again for capital punishment. Cat's Eye is proud to be among the first to bring the kite down and to join forces with those (including the Pope, no less) who decry the death penalty as a return to barbarism.

The death penalty has always worked against the poor and the illiterate, and in the USA, against African Americans, who form the vast majority on death row.

Liberals and the Left in Sri Lanka have often urged governments to look into the causes of murder, and both Dr. Colvin R. de Silva and Pieter Keueneman in the 1950s debates, spoke of the social and economic contexts in which murders occurred. As Clarence Darrow in the USA said:

> "From the beginning, a procession of the poor, the weak, the unfit have gone through our jails to their death. They have been victims. Crime and poverty and ignorance have always gone hand in hand. When our law makers realise this, they will stop legislating more punishment and go after its causes. (from Moldrich 1983)

TAMIL AND SINHALESE NATIONALIST WRITINGS OF THE 1980's

Myths Without Conscience

Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy

The intensification of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict in the 1980's has led to the development of "morbid symptoms" not only in our political process, as evidenced by the creation of a national security state, but also in our scholarship and political writings. The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of these writings and to point to their relationship to nationalist ideology.

As Romila Thapar writes in "Communalism and Ancient History",

> "Historical Interpretation is integrally related to a people's notion of its culture and nationality. This in itself makes historical writing one of the most sensitive intellectual areas with wide repercussions on popular nationalism and political beliefs".

This preliminary inquiry will be divided into two parts. The first will take a look at two recent and Important works on Tamil nationalism - a book by Satchi Ponnambalam entitled the "National Question and the Tamil Struggle", and an article by N. Satyendra called "Legitimate Expectations".

The second part of the inquiry will be directed by one aspect of the latter day reiteration of past myths by Sinhalese ideologies. Writings in this category are numerous, emanating from official sources such as The Ministry of State and also from various unofficial groups and individuals. Some of the more blatant of these publications such as Kauda Kotiya (Who is the Tiger?), Sinhalayage Adisi Hatura (The Invisible Enemy of the Sinhalese) have already been analysed and debunked by some Sinhala scholars who have also examined the mystic background common to these writings in separate as well as joint volumes.

Kumari Jayawardena's Ethnic and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka; The Social Scientist Association's Ethnicity and Social Change; The Committee for Rational Development's Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict, Myths and Realities, as well as individual articles by scholars such as K. M. De Silva and C. R. De Silva, have provided the

backdrop for a critical assault on some of the myths relating to Sinhala nationalism.

I do not therefore propose to deal with all aspects of Sinhalese nationalist myth making. However, there has recently been a spate of writing which use archaeological and settlement history as a means of reiterating Sinhala myths about the Sri Lankan nation-state. In this regard, I propose to look at one of these, a more scholarly article by G. H. Pieris on "An Appraisal of the Concept of a Traditional Tamil Homeland" which has been widely disseminated and references to which have appeared even in our daily newspapers.

Disturbing Trends in Tamil National Writing

Until the 1970's Tamil politics at the national level was "rights" oriented, a reaction against measures taken by governments motivated by a Sinhala nationalist ideology. Though Tamil culture and creative writing witnessed a renaissance in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka after the rise of the DMK, Tamil political discourse in Sri Lanka in the 50's and the 60's was characterised by a sense of grievance and political oppression.

The rhetoric and language of Tamil politics was "developmental" - i.e., grievances with regard to education, employment and land. In addition, it was "democratic" - i.e. against laws that appeared to discriminate against the Tamil language and for political structures which would allow for autonomy in predominantly Tamil areas. Consciousness was centred around language and economic rights. This has been analysed by Professor Sivathamby as being the discourse of the Federal Party, which represented for the most part, the interests of the Tamil middle-classes.

In June 1985, at Thimpu, the Tamil groups put forward four principles as a framework for resolving the present crisis -

a) recognition of the separate national identity of the Tamils;

b) respect for the integrity of the traditional Tamil homeland;

c) recognition of the right to self-determination of the Tamils; and

d) citizenship rights for all Tamils.

These principles are of course the expression of a people who have mov-ed away from the concept of Tamil rig-hts to an ideology of Tamil nationalism.

It can be said that nationalism in any form has both progressive and regressive aspects as part of its core. Tamil nationalism, like its Sinhala counterpart in the1950's is no exception. Tamil nationalism has had a positive impact on Sri Lankan Tamil society; with its rise, for the first time, Tamil politics is actively speaking out against distinctions of class, caste and gender. Sri Lankan Tamil society which was conservative and hierarchical is finally being challenged from within. The discourse contains a mixture of democratic, populist and leftist ideologies.

Tamil political awareness, as reflected in the writings of those committed to a Tamil nationalism has within it, seeds of social liberation. At the same time, like Sinhala nationalism of the 1950's, the discourse of Tamil nationalism, especially as expressed in certain types of expatriate literature, appears to contain the same communalism, which if unchallenged will lead us further into the modern era of neo-tribalism.

Sinhalese intellectuals in the 1950's who attempted to straddle both the progressive and negative aspects of nationalist ideology, ended up in the 1980's as sad apologists for ethnic chauvinism. If they were analysing any other part of the world but their own, their approach would have been different. But, bogged down by an ideology which had a built-in ethnic bias, their conscience failed. The imperatives of tribe and religion prevailed over abstract philosophies, so much so that many ended up justifying the 1983 riots, or resisting any attempts to dispel the racial hysteria of the times.

Some spent their efforts constructing international conspiracy theories or recreating past myths refusing to come to terms with their own chauvinism and intolerance. The few Sinhalese who attempted to fight this regressive nationalism were castigated in the media as betrayers of the Buddha, half-castes and generally traitors to race and religion. Many others just remained silent, hostage to the "mass consciousness" which ironically may have been of their own creation.

It may be argued that Tamil intellectuals cannot afford to make the same mistake. Political ideologies which further the cause of social justice, which fight oppression and exploitation must be distinguished from those which find their sustenance only in tribe, race and ethnicity. The right of ethnic groups to political expression, to political autonomy and even to a separate state may be justified in "political" terms of the right to self-determination or the right to be free from oppression or exploitation. It poses difficult problems, if it is justified in terms of the discourse of a chosen people.

Many progressive scholars will however, argue that the nationalism of the oppressor must be distinguished from the nationalism of the oppressed. But, experience, especially in Sri Lanka, has shown us that even if this type of discourse is marginal during the period of dissent, it becomes more legitimate when movements acquire political power. Unless there is a deliberate attempt to counter this consciousness, it may emerge as the dominant force in Tamil political thinking.

The discourse of a chosen people, which is a familiar and important part of Sinhalese nationalism has become a new and disturbing phenomenon in Tamil political writing. In surveying some of the books and articles, which have come out since 1983 there appears to be an alarming and rapidly growing process of myth creation about Sri Lankan Tamils. It is important that these myths be dispelled now, before they receive ideological vigour.

Where does this discourse come from? The rise of the DMK in Tamil Nadu and its version of anti-Brahmin, populist nationalism had an important effect on Sri Lankan Tamil consciousness in the 50's and 60's. Tamil pride in culture and language had been an important part of Tamil identity, but there was no automatic spill over into Tamil political discourse and political writing.

Even as early as the 1950's, Mr. C. Suntheralingam spoke in terms of a Dravida, Saiva Siddhanta consciousness as part of the Sri Lankan Tamil identity. However, his writings were on the fringe of the movement and were, therefore not reflected in the consciousness of other Tamil political leaders, especially S. J. V. Chelvanayagam, who was a Christian with little affinity for this type of political consciousness.

In the 1970's when the demand for a separate state was made, there was much writing which pointed to a sense of pride in Tamil history; but, again Tamil political discussion and discourse, whether among moderate Tamils, or in the publications of Tamil militant groups, centred around Tamil grievances based on linguistic and territorial rights and their sense of oppression. It was this discourse that gave birth to the concept of a Tamil Linguistic region.

The riots of 1983, however, had a major qualitative impact not only in terms of the increasing radicalisation of the Tamil population, but also in the type of language and discourse used to present the Tamil cause. Certain Tamil nationalist myths which had been politically latent began to be openly expressed; there was a deliberate and conscious attempt to create a Dravida, Saiva Siddhanta political identity.

The main thrust of this campaign appears to come, not so much from Madras or Jaffna, where every day issues of survival point to a different type of politics, but from the expatriate community, who have begun to write extensively on Tamil history and ideology. Their writings are circulated widely and have an important effect on Tamil consciousness.

Many Tamil social scientists have argued in private that this new phase in Tamil nationalist writing is an attempt by the middle-class, expatriate population to capture momentum and give ideological direction to the Tamil nationalist movement which for the most part has relied on general concepts of freedom from oppression and the right to self-determination. However, impugning motives to expatriate scholars, and thereby dismissing the influence of such writing may under-estimate the power of such ideology which draws sustenance only from ethnic loyalty. There is no doubt that these writings have become an influential part of the ideological debate and it is, therefore, necessary to analyse the political implications of such myths of dissemination.

The evolution of these nationalist myths can only be understood in the context of Sinhala nationalist ideology to which it is a political response. Sinhalese social scientists such as Kumari Jayawardena, R. A. L. H Gunewardena, Gananath Obeysekere etc... have outlined these Sinhalese myths in detail. Drawn from Sinhalese chronicles, Sinhala nationalism sees Sri Lanka as the home of the Sinhala, Aryan race and the Buddhist religion. This identity has with time become a pan-class identity.

Though, it has been pointed out that social analysis which attempts to understand nationalism only in terms of myths and symbols is inadequate, the experience of Sinhala nationalism points to the fact that a nationalist ideology which appeals to certain types of myths and symbols has a powerful internal dynamic which cannot be understood by analysing material forces of production alone.

Tamil myths as currently espoused by some Tamil expatriate scholars appeals to have the following elements:

Firstly, Tamils of Sri Lanka are the heirs to an old and ancient civilisation which has its roots in Mohenjadaro and Harappa civilisations which had been destroyed by less developed Aryans from West Asia.

Secondly, Tamils are the original inhabitants of Sri Lanka and the Sinhalese are actually Tamils who came later to the island and became Sinhalese after adopting Buddhism as their religion.

Thirdly, the Tamil language spoken in Sri Lanka is its purest form; it is Tamil as spoken during the Sangam renaissance of the ninth century.

Fourthly, Saiva Siddhanta is the religion of the Tamil people and has a special homeland in Sri Lanka because of the teachings of Arumuga Navalar.

There are many aspects to the creation of this Dravida, Saiva Siddhanta identity which are rather disturbing. In the first place, the sources used to argue the Tamil case, especially with regard to ancient Tamil, are the very same sources that have been proved to be historically unreliable by critical Sinhalese scholars. Generally most Tamil scholars accept the Mahavamsa only as a source of legends. Satchi Ponnambalam in fact calls some Mahavamsa stories "nothing but a tangled web of cleverly contrived fiction". However, this does not prevent a few Tamil scholars from using the Mahavamsa as a source when convenient. For example one of the arguments put forward to prove that the Sinhalese are of Tamil descent is a quotation from the Mahavamsa that Prince Vijaya, after rejecting Kuv-eni, married a princess from Madurai (South India), and his courtiers married Tamil women of nobility.

Writes Satyendra:

"The Sinhala chronicle, the Mahavamsa, also records that a few years after his arrival in Sri Lanka, Prince Vijaya and his followers married Tamils from the Pandyan kingdoms in South India."

It is, therefore, asserted that from the beginning the Sinhalese were a mixed race. The fact that most ethnic groups as they exist today are mixed races is perhaps correct, but using the Mahavamsa as a historical source, whether by Tamils or Sinhalese, poses major problems of interpreting historical reality. In some cases, Tamil writers have used the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as sources to show an early Tamil presence in Sri Lanka.

"The Mahabharata and Ramayana the two great Indian epics written in Sanskrit before the Sixth Century B.C. mention the Naga kingdoms and their conquest by Ravana, the Tamil Yaksha King of Sri Lanka".

This type of history, which uses legend as empirical fact, must be challenged and discredited, regardless of the biases of the author or text.

The Dravidian
Race and Myths of Origin:

Ashis Nandy in his recent book on colonialism outlines two forms of contemporary dissent. The first accepts the world view of the oppressor and dissents from within the value framework. The second accepts the oppressor's definition of the other but glorifies the very values which are anathema to the oppressor.

Tamils living in Sri Lanka have been constantly subjected to the Sinhalese version of the "Aryan" myth; Anagarika Dharmpala's noble Aryan race has been rammed down their throats ever since independence was achieved. As a reaction to glorification of the "Aryan", there is an increasing Tamil tendency, to speak of the noble Dravidian past. Mohenjadaro is said to be the world's oldest civilisation which was destroyed by less than civilised Aryan hordes.

The remnants of this old and majestic Dravidian civilisation can only be found in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka so the argument goes:

> "The Tamils of Sri Lanka are an ancient people... It was a Dravidian civilisation which traced its origins to the people of Mohendajaro in the Indus valley around 2,000 years before Christ".

A concept of Aryan as a racial category has been dismissed by scholars from around the world. Max Miller accepted, in the end, that he used the term "Aryan" to describe certain languages. The extension of this linguistic concept to convey a sense of race was a contribution of the German nationalist movement, especially in its Nazi phase. R. A. L. H. Gunewardene in his article on "The People of the Lion" shows that the term Aryan was not used in the traditional chronicles of Sri Lanka.

Aryan as denoting Sinhala racial ideology is therefore false. The cry of Dravidian is equally mythical. Dravidian is a linguistic category not a racial one, and it is highly unlikely that the Tamils living in Sri Lanka are the lineal descendants of the citizens of Mohenjadaro.

The Sinhalese have always claimed that they were the original inhabitants of Sri Lanka, with the Tamil presence always being that of invader. The Sinhalese chronicles, the Mahavamsa and the Dipavamsa, are used as evidence of this claim to priority. To combat this myth of origin, Tamil scholars such as Ponnambalam have this to say:

> "According to tradition, the Tamils of India and Sri Lanka are the lineal descendants of the Naga and Yaksha people. (According to Harry Williams) Nagadipa in the north of Sri Lanka was an actual kingdom known to historians and the people who occupied it were all part of an immigrant tribe from South India, Tamil people called Nagars... The conclusions that could validly be drawn from the new historical data clearly establish that the ancestors of the present day Tamils were the original occupiers of the island long before 543 B.C. which the pali chronicles date as the earliest human habitation of Sri Lanka".

Ironically, the assertion of the rights of one ethnic group results in the need to delegitimize the other. Latter day Sinhala nationalists, using the Mahavamsa, delegitimise Tamil claims by portraying them as foreigners and invaders. The Tamil response to this allegation is to assert that there is no such thing as a Sinhalese. While the Tamils are "the lineal descendants of the original inhabitants of the Island", the Sinhalese lack pedigree, "no matter what the racial origin, little remains of the original stock, except belief in it". Finally, the King who accepted Buddhism for Sri Lanka is described as Devampiya Theesan, a Tamil Hindu King of Lanka.

It is perhaps time that both Tamils and Sinhalese accept the findings of such researchers as Senake Bandaranayake, who have clearly pointed to the fact that Tamils, Sinhalese, and Muslims in Sri Lanka are a racially mixed group. Waves of immigration and internal migration have obliterated any claims to racial exclusivity. Sinhala and Tamil may be products of ethnic and religious consciousness but there is no racial basis for differentiation whether as noble Aryans or glorious Dravidians. Senake Bandaranayake writes:

> "It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that the peopling of Sri Lanka and the formation of its ethnic variety have been an extremely complex process which we do not fully understand yet... Again, it is important to keep in mind that the ethnic composition of the Sinhalese both in cultural and also bio-ethnic and demographic sense was not the product of a single historical period or a unilinear process, but, one that took place throughout a long history... the same methodology can be applied to other nationalities".

Saiva Siddhanta

The notion that saivaism was the original religion of the Tamil people from pre- Aryan days and that being Tamil is synonymous with the practice of Saivaism has also to be challenged:

> "And though through the vehicle of the Tamil language came Saivaism, a religion which the Oxford scholar G. U. Pope called "the most elaborate, influential and undoubtedly the most intrinsically valuable of all religions...." many have regarded Saivaism and Tamil as being almost synonymous and that one cannot exist without the other. It is rightly said "Thamilum Saivamum; Saivamum Thamilum."

It must be said in all fairness that not all are agreed on this approach to Tamil identity. Satchi Ponnambalam for one, strongly believes that the Tamil identity has no religious base and that religion for Tamils is a matter of conscience. But, any attempt to link religion and community can lead to exclusive tendencies and has chauvinist potential.

Saiva Siddhanta appears to have two sources with regard to its philosophy. Shivapadasunderam in his book on the Saiva School of Hinduism states that the authoritative works on Saivaism are the twenty eight Sivagamas which are originally in Sanskrit. A chapter of the Raurava Agama, called Sivagnanabodham and consisting of twelve couplets said to have been revealed to Saint Nandi, as the essence of Agamas, was translated into Tamil in the twelfth century by Meikandar who also added to it a commentary. This was expanded by his disciples and later saints into what is now considered the Saiva Siddhanta doctrine.

It is also said that some of the thoughts on Saivaism were drawn from the original works in Tamil such

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as the Thirumanthiram or Thirumalar written in the first century.

The philosophy of Saiva Siddhanta became an important part of Tamil identity in Sri Lanka when Arumuga Navalar, the great nineteenth century reformer, revived the doctrine in Jaffna and South India.

It is, however, a grave mistake to think that Hinduism, let alone Saiva Siddhanta is synonymous with Tamil. Tamil Nadu was the centre of Buddhist and Jain learning until the tenth century. In fact, it is argued that the great Hindu revival of the ninth and tenth centuries was a reaction to the powerful intellectual influences of Buddhism and Jain texts. Some great Tamil works such as the Silappadikaram and the Manimekalai were Buddhist and Jain texts. Tamil religious history has thus been pluralistic and cannot be confined to one specific doctrine.

Saiva Siddhanta as it exists today is an erudite philosophy which supposedly explains the essence of Siva worship. Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam summarises this essence as follows...Saiva Siddhanta postulates three entitles - God (Pati), the Soul (Pasu) and Bondage (Pasam). The scheme of the Universe has for its aim the removal of the Soul's impurity and its union with the Lord Siva so as to destroy duality and maya (illusion). The devotional aspects of Bhakti worship are combined with the more philosophical tradition of the Vedanta.

Saiva Siddhanta is said to be extremely metaphysical and it is claimed that some of the concepts for primordial energy can only be communicated in the Tamil language. However, it is unlikely that the refined doctrine of Saiva Siddhanta is the basis of the religiosity of the majority of Tamil people in Sri Lanka.

Popular religion is rarely found in this abstract form. The vast majority of Hindus in the North are Bhakti worshippers, devout followers of Lord Muruga, Ganesha, Amman and Shiva. To claim that all Tamils are followers of Saiva Siddhanta is an artificial attempt to construct a monolithic religious doctrine to unite the Tamil people. This is not only unusually doctrinaire but goes against the essence of Hindu philosophy which has had a strong tradition of syncretism, drawing from all religions and popular traditions.

The use of Saiva Siddhanta as a gospel for the Tamil nationalist movement also poses major problems. This gospel of Saiva Siddhanta, as a part of Tamil nationalist political discourse must be as alienating to the non-Hindus as Buddhism was for a pan-Sri Lankan identity. If the Tamil movement is to be seen as being historically progressive in the Sri Lankan context, then it must be a movement which is secular and which accepts the multi-ethnic character of our (Sri Lankan) society.

Linguistic nationalism

The Tamil language has been one of the most important rallying points of the Tamil movement. The demand for the recognition of a Tamil Linguistic Region is a product of this consciousness. Given the fact that Tamil grievances gathered momentum in Sri Lanka after the passage of the Sinhala Only Act, it is not surprising that the Tamil language should be a focal point of Tamil identity. In addition, it is the Tamil language as spoken in Sri Lanka which provides an identity to the Sri Lankan Tamil distinctive from his or her Tamil Nadu counterpart.

Even before the current ethnic conflict, Sri Lankan Tamils have expressed pride in their language in no uncertain terms:

> "Tamil is one of the oldest languages of the world and it flowered both in South India and Sri Lanka. It is a language that has given the world the distilled wisdom of the Kural of which it has been said there hardly exists in the world a collection of maxims in which we have more lofty wisdom".

Since 1956, the Tamil language has lost status in Sri Lanka from "rights" value to "use" value. Legislation such as the Sinhala Only Act struck at the heart of Sri Lanka Tamil identity. Though denial of language rights is an aspect of political oppression, in asserting these rights one must be aware of the pitfalls of linguistic nationalism. Recent writings by such writers as Benedict Anderson point to the fact that linguistic nationalism is often the most virulent form of nationalism. Sinhalese nationalism as articulated by vernacular speaking elites is a classic example of this type of virulence.

Critical social scientists must, however, ask the question as to what group or class benefits from this type of nationalism. Benedict Anderson researching forms of nationalism throughout the world comes to the conclusion that it is the ideology of the elites educated in the vernacular, harbouring tremendous resentment against races and classes which have prevented their upward social mobility. This class is radical with regard to imperialism and international capitalism but conservative with regard to its own nationalism and ethnic pride. Anderson points to the fact that this ideology is particularly powerful because the vernacular speaking elites usually control the communication system in any given society.

The fact that the Tamil language has been discriminated against since independence can be well substantiated by historical fact. However, it may be necessary to see whether Anderson's thesis is relevant with regard to Tamil nationalism. Sri Lankan Tamil writing, due to the recent diaspora, is no longer dependent on the Sri Lankan state for publication and dissemination. Self-criticism, in line with Anderson's thesis, may therefore have to become an essential part of Tamil social science.

Traditional homelands and Sinhalese myths

Even as we critically assess myth creation on the part of Tamil writers, we have to be watchful of the continuing process of myth reiteration on the part of Sinhalese scholars. Given the fact Sinhalese nationalist ideology has State-backing, this type of enterprise may have disturbing consequences. As mentioned earlier, myths with regard to "Aryan", "Sinhala" and "Buddhist" have been under scrutiny from critical Sinhalese scholars since the 1960's. However, there have been a series of recent articles on archaeology and settlement which in an indirect way reinforce Sinhalese myths about history.

Though many writings have appeared, I would prefer to concentrate on what appears to be a genuine scholarly attempt to deal with the relationship between settlement history and ethnic conflict. This is a paper by Professor G.H. Pieris, references to which have appeared in the national press, and which is entitled "An Appraisal of the Concept of a Traditional Tamil Homeland in Sri Lanka". In his paper G.H. Pieris states that the Sinhalese and "Sinhala purana" vil-

lagers were the original settlers of the Eastern province.

Whether the Nagas were Tamil and whether they were the first inhabitants of Sri Lanka or whether "Sinhala purana villagers" were the original settlements in the eastern province may be of interest to historians and geographers but is this really relevant to the current political debate?

G.H. Pieris cannot even argue that his paper is a balanced non-political piece of writing because he presents his argument in no uncertain terms as a polemic against Tamil political demands:

> "Among the various exemplifications of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka, those related to claims over territory have acquired increasing prominence during the recent past. These claims are based on the perception that certain parts of the country belong exclusively to the Sri Lankan Tamils.... The present study is an attempt to place this perception under critical scrutiny".

Some scholars may contest Professor Pieris's empirical findings but to do so is to return to the debate on myths of origin who came first to the eastern province etc... the type of debate which has characterised our research and accentuated the ethnic conflict. I prefer, instead to contest his premises and assumptions.

One could argue that scholars who analyse Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict are divided into two schools; those whose approach comes from a desire for modern solutions to contemporary problems of Justice and Democracy and those who argue from a vantage point of historical right. The former use modern sources usually from comparative history; the latter draw their inspiration from history and archaeology.

A theory of social justice which primarily or exclusively rests on an analysis of historical research and historical right has enormous pitfalls. For example, it may be interesting to ask Pieris whether if independent, convincing research were to really show that the Tamils came first to the Northern and Eastern province and had a historical presence there, would Tamils, therefore, have the right to a separate state? If it is proved that the Nagas were in fact Tamils, does this mean that the Tamils have the right to rule the whole island even in areas where the Sinhalese are a majority? And what about Muslims? What claims do they have in this era of competing historical rights?

The reverse type of questions could be asked of Satchi Ponnambalam and N. Satyendra. Any claim to modern justice based on an analysis of early history must be treated with extreme scepticism. However in refuting the historical claims of one ethnic group, say the Tamil, many scholars end up reiterating the historical right of the other ethnic group, say the Sinhalese. As a result they get trapped by the subject of inquiry into the discourse of land claims and land rights. These are self-perpetuating debates that are somewhat escapist especially during times of crisis and confrontation. The current debate on traditional homelands and archaeological settlement is one such exercise in futility.

Another problem is that scholars such as G.H. Pieris treat the concept of "traditional homeland" as a geographical concept rather than a political one and in doing so, construct an elaborate argument on who lived where and when. Though there is a claim to objectivity, his own political bias comes into evidence when he quoted E.B. Denham as part of his resume -

> "..... among the races that are most numerous in Ceylon, only one race can regard Ceylon as the home of the nation and the shrine of its national traditions".

Why this quote? One must seriously consider whether articles such as these which object to the concept of Tamil traditional homelands come from an understanding of the political concept of traditional homelands or from a belief that Sri Lanka is the ancestral property of the Sinhalese. Prof. Pieris attempts to tear down Tamil claims to traditional homelands not with the critical scientific intention of scoffing at all political enterprises which mystically connect land with people but with the seeming purpose of legitimising the profoundly Sinhala myth that Sri Lanka is a nation-state, a land which historically belongs to the Sinhalese, even though some parts have been "Tamilised".

> "There is indeed a mass of evidence which shows that upto about the 13th century the more powerful Sinhalese rulers did exercise sovereignty over the entire island..."

But is this the historical norm? K.M. De Silva seems to think otherwise:

> "Indeed one had to look further back into the past to find a period when Sinhalese rulers had control over the whole island to the second half of the 11th century and the first half of the twelfth. But even this had been in effect an interlude of indigenous rule sandwiched between two phases of South Indian domination."

In fact K.M. De Silva argues that British rule was a turning point with regard to the effective administration of a centralised state.

Using the framework of a Rajarata Region which has been subsequently Tamilised, G.H. Pieris goes into imply that the presence of Sinhala purana villagers in the Eastern Province in ancient and medieval times justifies modern day state-aided colonisation schemes which are altering the ethnic power balance of the province at the time of independence or as it exists today.

It may be convenient to caricature political problems associated with state-aided colonisation schemes as a primordial struggle over ancestral property. To do so, however, is to miss the point. Tamil claims against land settlement policies result from their present fears and destruction of their political power and economic security. Their claims are against the post-Donoughmore Sinhala-dominated state which held out the promise of a Sri Lankan nation. The problem of colonisation is a modern problem of ethnic minorities, who are alienated from a state which reflects the interests of a seemingly hostile ethnic majority.

These are sensitive political issues that surely cannot be conceptualised as a simple quarrel over ancestral lands.

In addition G.H. Pieris's concept of settlement and of history in the North and the East is unilinear. In terms of settlement as well as political history he assumes that the Sinhalese and the Rajarata civilisation came first and then around the twelfth century the region was 'Tamilised'. This unilinear approach to ethnic settlement has rarely been accepted by social scientists who see settlement

as a complex dynamic process, autonomous from the forces of political and dynastic history. This autonomy provides for a different type of process leading to what is now termed "subaltern studies". One of the accepted premises of this understanding is that history of archaeological settlement cannot be analysed using modern political categories as they exist in modern nation states.

R. A. L. H. Gunawardena writes for eg:

"The disparate nature of the early settlements in the island, with each village clustering around a small reservoir would not be conducive to the development of strong group identities.....it will be evident from the preceding survey that the nature of Sinhala identity as well as the relationship of the group brought together by this identity with other groupings based on religion, ritual status and languages varied in different periods of history".

In fact, one has to ask what is "Tamilised" and what is "Sinhalised" and which came first? Gananath Obeysekere writes:

"Except perhaps for the oldest stratum of settlers prior to 500 B.C. almost all subsequent settlers in Sri Lanka came from South India, most from Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Kerala and quickly became Sinhalised".

Michael Roberts has a similar view of migration of some of the Sinhalese castes:

"In common with such castes as the Salagama and the Durava, the Karava (were) made up of relatively recent Dravidian migrants. Nevertheless, they slotted into the structure of caste-regulated corvee service and came to be regarded as Sinhalese castes".

Of what real significance are the modern political identities of "Tamil" and "Sinhalese" and the modern political debate on land policy to studying settlement patterns of ancient and medieval Sri Lanka. How relevant were they to the group identities and self-perceptions of those dots in settlement maps?

The history of settlements and the political history and ideology of states cannot be collapsed into one research realm. Scholars have long ago come to terms with differences which exist between political history and political discourse on the one hand and migration and settlement patterns on the other. In addition, to try and read the past through present controversies is often an unnecessary and misplaced enterprise; such an approach to the present conflict will only compound existing problems.

The failure to distinguish between the actuality of settlements and the imperatives of ideology also poses problems for the understanding of the concept of traditional homelands. In his haste to treat traditional homelands as a geographical concept, G.H. Pieris does not attempt to come to terms with the concept of traditional homelands as it is actually used in anthropological and political science literature.

The term originated in anthropological literature with attempts to describe the lifestyle of tribal groups. In political science, the term - traditional homelands - has become a part of the arsenal of liberal, democratic discourse and is used in situations where a territorial ethnic minority which does not control state power asserts its rights against the State, especially when the state attempts to dilute the political power of the ethnic group or to alter its social and economic lifestyle. It is in this context that the Tamil claim to traditional homelands can be best understood.

Ironically, the concept of traditional homelands is an aspect of political discourse which attempts to find solution of ethnic conflict within the framework of a nation-state. In fact in South Africa the term is anathema precisely because of its collaborationist connotations. In the Sri Lankan context, the term traditional homelands has been "primitivised" into a primordial debate over territory, history, claims and counter-claims.

It must be accepted that the concept of traditional homelands differs from the notion of promised land, a chosen piece of territory for a chosen people. The concept of Sinhadvipa is a variant of this type of political discourse. It is true that some aspects of Tamil nationalist writing also speak in these terms and in terms of an exclusive homeland for Tamils.

In his article, Professor Pieris presents us with some quotations of this type of Tamil nationalist claims. In such a context, it is vital that these attempts at creating mystical connections between land and people be confronted and criticised, not from a vantage point of attempting to stake a superior claim for a particular ethnic group but from the perspective that all claims to promised land always lead to ethnic chauvinism and a desire for territorial expansion.

With the intensification of the present ethnic conflict, we, as a society have forgotten, or have chosen to forget, the deeply humane aspects of our respective traditions. Instead, many writers and ideologues from various communities continue to emphasize those aspects of our culture and history which accentuate differences and which see ethnic loyalty as the supreme human value.

Modern political categories are used as mirrors into the past and history is used as a weapon in an ethnic war of words. The issues of justice and oppression get lost in a discour-se of historical fact and counter-fact. Ironically, in this struggle for the "correct" historical interpretation, other more universal social values are oft-en forgotten. Perhaps, at times such as these it is best to remember Ashis Nandy's famous truism, "that knowledge without ethics is not so much bad ethics as inferior knowledge". ●

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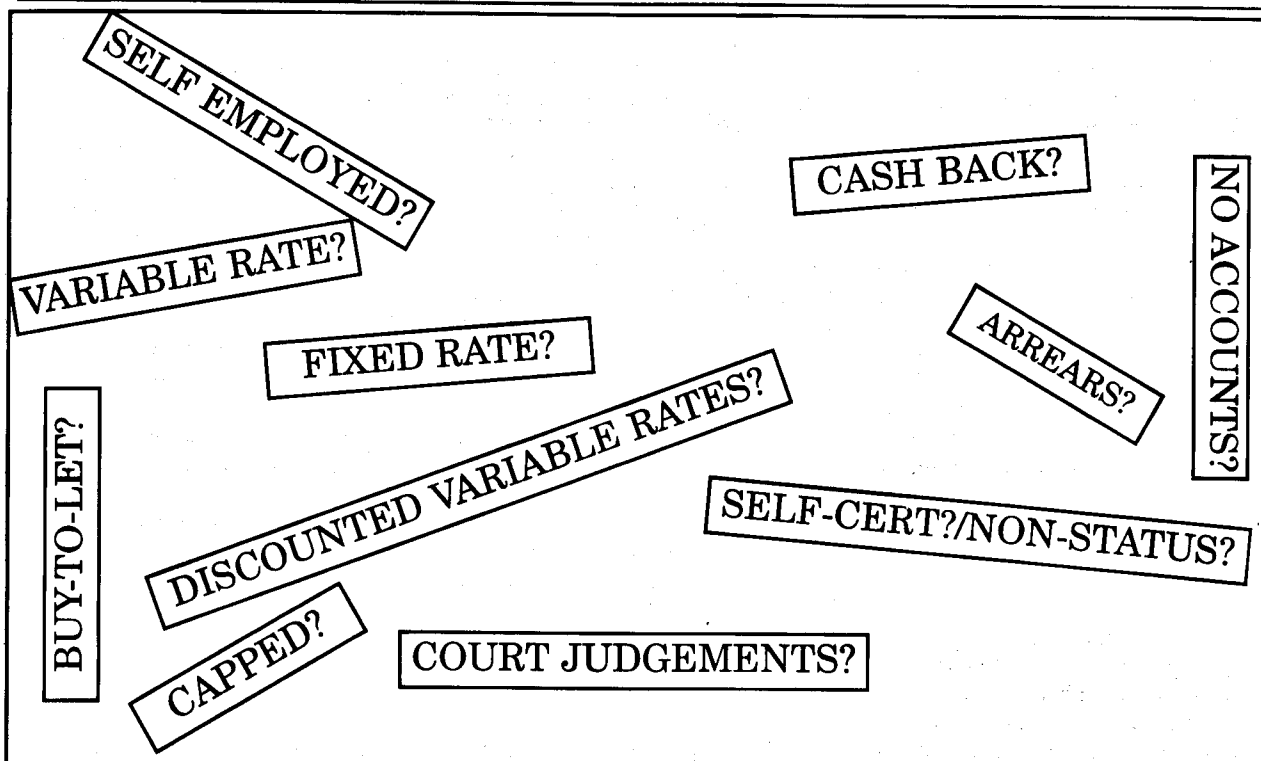

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Need for an Enlightened Leadership

"I have striven all my life for the liberating of India. But if I could get it only by violence, I would not want it."

Brave words uttered by a person who took on the whole British Empire armed with one indomitable and resolute strategy, that of non-violence. His possessions were a crude staff to support his feeble frame and a hand-woven cloth to wrap his nakedness and protect himself from the penetrating cold.

The British throne was aware that a whole nation stood behind this fragile figure whose credo was freedom through non-violence. Challenging Gandhi, 'the naked fakir', was no political trifle. It meant challenging an entire nation. Such was the resolve of a people whose leaders eschewed every form of personal gain or vested interest, which could tarnish and paralyze a nation's struggle for independence. Gandhi's triumph encapsulated overwhelmingly the synergy of democratic forces which translated themselves into an unremitting people's power. This is the moral stuff of which genuine leadership is made and it stands out as a beacon worthy of emulation.

There was a glimpse, a faint shadow, a silhouette of such leadership manifested a few days ago. No one ever thought it could and would happen: a tete-a-tete between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the Opposition Leader Ranil Wickramasinghe. A continuous campaign of vilification, highly strung vitriolic and sometimes socially degrading language used against the opponent were all indicative of a total political war between the two parties that made the northern debacle pale into oblivion.

But what really made the tide turn? Was it the Wayamba vaudeville that had made a mockery of the people's franchise, one of the most hallowed institutions of democracy? Was it a 'save face' device to counter the mounting opposition both at home and abroad that was gathering momentum against the two main political parties, thereby unwittingly letting the floating vote gravitate towards a seemingly less corrupt JVP? Was it the insurmountable pressure exerted by the people's organizations and election monitoring NGOs who were unsparing in their attacks on the behaviour of the two main political parties? All this may not amount to more than mere speculation, but the dividing line between speculation and reality is too narrow, obtuse and often tend to overlap.

Remorse for Past Sins

What the Wayamba elections revealed without the slightest ambiguity was that the major political parties had crossed the limits of propriety and respect for democratic institutions. Even though the elections were won by the PA, the results were exposed to public moral indictment, particularly from religious leaders, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, the business community and election monitoring groups. These civic minded bodies vowed to rouse the masses from their slumbering indolence and militantly oppose any form of philandering with the country's legitimate democratic processes.

The gangrene of thuggery, perpetrated by unlimited political power, that entered the electoral process during the District Development Council elections in Jaffna in 1981, had infected nearly every hallowed democratic institution to such an extent that Wayamba became the point of eruption from where emanated putrid odours of a decomposing democracy. All this was more than what a highly politicized civil society could stomach.

Opposition leader Ranil Wickramasinghe's apology to the nation for electoral abuses committed during the UNP regime, was indeed a welcome gesture. Very rarely do political leaders in Sri Lanka appropriate the role of the trenchant critic of crimes committed by one's own party and take the rap for its actions. The tendency, by and large, has been to transpose the blame onto others. Reports transpiring from cabinet meetings also showed a resolute President Kumaratunga threatening to resign if future campaigns were to be marred by election malpractices by her party members. Cynics may argue that all these were a subterfuge intended to impress the press and the public.

There are those unrelenting skeptics who would rush to warn us that circumspection is the best virtue when faced with the pronouncements of politicians. Be that as it may, their statements shall remain as measurements of the democratic credentials of two important leaders who hold the future of this country in their hands. It is worthwhile remembering that they will be guilty of gratuitous insult to people's intelligence if they were to forget that both they and their parties have too many skeletons in their cupboard which need cleansing before they engage in vituperative allegations of corruption against each other.

Cost Cutting on Propaganda War

Up until now, initiatives on the part of political leaders to curb corruption when elections come around have been lame and lackadaisical.

Politicians and their bandwagon that aspire to taste the 'flesh-pots of Egypt' when they enter the portals of power have in recent times been engaged in a fanfaronade spree, pompously spending on larger-than-life cut-outs, stretching banners across every light-post in town and disfiguring every available space on street walls. The rush for the walls was so intense that special squads had to be recruited whose sole livelihood has been on renting out buckets, brushes and 'man-power' to keep the poster campaign of bloated personalities with their grinning faces alive.

It boggles the mind to wonder from what sources such campaign funds were obtained. There is little

doubt that local business entrepreneurs and shopkeepers were often fleeced by various political party candidates to pay for the illegal propaganda. Some of these persons may have silently succumbed to such political acts of extortion to forestall damage to their investments. The more unscrupulous - drug cartels and sex purveyors - may have had more pernicious motives in mind when they made their contributions.

India overcame this vice to some extent through a quaint law of 1919 in the Indian Penal Code which stated that "anybody, other than the candidate, spending any sum on anyone's behalf would entail that person being sentenced to jail". In 1996, Indian election expenses were reduced to at least 1/10th!

It is indeed heartening to observe the recently constituted Election Monitoring Committee (EMC) deciding on a ban on bill-boards, cut-outs, pandals and posters. This will not only curtail profligate spending, but will also level the field for smaller parties and independent candidates to meet the voter on his/her own merit, than to be drowned in the scurrilous propaganda of the major parties. The EMC was only reminding politicians of a law they themselves had passed in Parliament which they were so loathe to observe.

It is the common feeling that the electoral process has been infected with a mortal disease that needs to be diagnosed before democracy meets with an untimely death and the field left bare for problems to be resolved through the barrel of a gun. Wherever democracy has collapsed, there law and order have recorded gradual deterioration and dictatorships of the worse type have emerged. And wherever dictatorships have flourished, there poverty and misery have been the cruel and invasive consequences. Russia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Congo have been but recent examples of such tragic instances where democracy remained suppressed and stymied for years.

More Muscle
to the Election Commissioner

It is, therefore, of paramount importance that we pursue the path of democracy and arrest the cantankerous cancer that causes its decay. To begin with, the Election Commissioner should be vested with sufficient powers to perform his duties without fear or favour to none. He needs sufficient legal muscle to curb election malpractices even to the point of cancelling elections if he considers them to be rife with considerable abuses.

It is rather unfortunate that there is no provision in our electoral system to prevent criminality from reaching the Provincial Councils and even Parliament. As things stand at present, challenging the legality of an election or of a particular elected candidate's criminal conduct in courts takes years to be disposed of. In the meantime, the seats of power could be occupied with gentlemen who are more suited to be denizens of our central prisons. It is incumbent, therefore, on all those who treasure democracy to exorcise those destructive demons in the system that violate a people's right to free and fair elections before democracy itself becomes heavily skewed.

(The writer is also the Editor of Social Justice the monthly journal published by the Centre for Society and Religion.)

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Election Violence: The Need for Dispassionate Assessment

Nirmalan Dhas

Following the recently concluded Wayamba Provincial Council Elections, two dominant trends have been clearly evident in the media. On the one hand there has been a shrill outcry that seeks to maintain that the Peoples Alliance organised a campaign of violence and electoral fraud that completely subverted the elections making it essential that fresh elections be held. On the other hand there has been an indignant cry of outraged innocence on the part of the Peoples Alliance which claims that it was the target of a campaign of electoral violence mounted against it by the United National Party and that Peoples Alliance cadres had been forced to fight back in self defence to advance their electoral campaigns.

The situation has been complicated by various election monitors, some of whom seem to believe that their mandate extends far beyond the documentation of incidents of violence, fraud and other occurrences that interfere with the democratic electoral process and the task of ensuring that the machinery of law enforcement acts against those responsible for such acts, to include also the task of deciding on the validity of an election as well as on appropriate governmental response to their verdicts in this respect.

Within the acrimonious situation that has resulted there is an obvious need for dispassionate analysis and comment on the violence that accompanied this election and the context within which it occurred. There is room too for the articulation of viable, appropriate and creative responses to polls related violence that may help prevent such violence at future polls. The advancement of such responses through their recommendation for adoption by the government and implementation by the commissioner of election at all forthcoming polls is one of the major tasks expected of organisations that have engaged in monitoring the elections. It is only through such a process of feedback and fine tuning based on a dialogue that rests on confidence and trust that violence and other aberrations can be eliminated from the electoral process.

The Context

The context in which this election took place is of paramount importance to such an analysis and must not be ignored. Central to this context is the fact that the Peoples Alliance Government has been the first to take decisive steps towards the realisation of the island's potential to emerge as the centre linking the South and South East Asian Regions and the Indian Ocean Rim Countries and as the platform housing the strategic function of the developmental process as it impacts upon regions. The pressures arising from such a move must not be underestimated. The willingness of the Peoples Alliance Government to accommodate the major changes in geo political relationships at regional level necessary to reformulate and maintain equilibrium within regional geostrategic equations has been clearly indicated by its pragmatic response to the Indian nuclear tests, the signing of the Indo Lanka Free Trade Agreement, its response to India's Sedusamudra Kaalvi Project and to the return of the first Chief Minister of the Northeast Provincial Council - Varatharajah Perumal - form his exile in India.

Quite clearly the Peoples Alliance Government has succeeded in positioning itself as the internal political player most able and willing to rapidly move towards the realisation of the islands potential. It is thereby also able to portray itself as the player most entitled to the goodwill and support of our neighbours and the International community towards this end. Since the realisation of the island's potential demands continuity of policy the Peoples Alliance Government is no doubt keenly aware that its ability to achieve this end depends upon its remaining in power for at least another term, and possibly longer. In the absence of skilled professional political strategists, propagandists, campaign managers and other elements vital to the achievement of this end through the electoral process it is quite possible that cynical elements within the government assumed that this evident need for continuity of policy could be made to take precedence over the need to strengthen - and not weaken - democratic processes such as the process of holding free and fair elections.

The fact that the Peoples Alliance faced the opposition of the United National Party which over the course of its years in power permitted itself to be gradually transformed into a cynical master of violence, brutality and subversion of the democratic process cannot be ignored. In the absence of skilled professionals capable of conducting a sophisticated electoral campaign - both within the Peoples Alliance as well as the United National Party - a move towards violent and brutal confrontation could never have been anything more than a short step away.

The Peoples Alliance also had to contend with the growing popularity of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna which has on more than one occasion resorted to the most cold blooded of killings on a massive scale and which despite its current claims to have dissociated itself from its bloody and violent path continues to maintain most of its machinery in a covert underground fashion. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna continues to appeal to a significant section of the electorate and nothing other than a lack of political sophistication within the Peoples Alliance has prevented the formation of some sort of creative engagement between it and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna.

Saddled also with an intelligence apparatus weighted towards the machinery of law and order, suspicious of think tanks and NGO's as well as sources of academic input, and known mostly for its real or imagined proclivities towards terror, torture and harassment and an infantile, obvious and bungling program of telephone tapping rather than a professional approach based on reliable research and analysis, and a primitive party structure with no identifiable strategic function, the Peoples Alliance seems to have entered the election not with the confidence of a party in power but riddled with the anxiety of a politi-

cal dilettante brought to power by forces it could not comprehend much less harness and utilise towards consolidating its position.

The need for the employment of sophisticated human resources at various levels affecting the task of governance has been articulated on several occasions before, particularly in respects to the need to manage ethnic contradictions and relations between ethnic communities. Many of those employed by NGO's for the task of monitoring should have been employed by the government long before the elections to formulate and implement measures that would ensure that violence and fraud did not occur and that in those instances where they may have occurred the machinery of law and order would move swiftly to punish those responsible.

The repeatedly demonstrated reluctance of the government to acquire the services of sophisticated human resources especially in those problematic areas of governance is very difficult to comprehend especially since the continued failure to do so will leave these problems unresolved and ensure a rapid deterioration of the political and economical situation.

Analysis

It appears that incidents that have occasioned serious dissatisfaction with and dissatisfaction towards the electoral process were facilitated by the following major factors:

- The governments overconfidence arising from its having successfully positioned itself as the internal entity most willing and able to realise the islands potential.
- The governments anxiety arising from its desire to consolidate its position and remain in power for long enough to realise this potential.
- The governments reluctance or inability to acquire the services of the sophisticated human resources required to initiate, support and sustain in those processes required to consolidate its position and remain in power while realising the islands potential, and its consequent inability to:
- Forge a synergistic working relationship with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and the New Left Front;
- Initiate and sustain strategic interaction with the United National Party;
- Build an effective strategic core group able to employ sophisticated systems of electoral competition free of violence and harassment;
- The governments reluctance to deal with the phenomenon of linkages between the criminal underworld, politicians and political parties
- The inability or refusal of the opposition to formulate and implement an effective, non violent and strategic response to these factors.

Some Possible Responses

Although much avoidable damage has already occurred it is still possible for the government to acquire the services of sophisticated human resources to review electoral procedures, analyse poll related violence and recommend preventive measures amongst which may be considered:

- The limiting of electoral canvassing to electronic and all other forms of media, and the postal and telecommunication system. All other forms of canvassing including the displaying of posters to be barred.
- Content of electoral canvassing to be limited to contents of developmental strategy, supporting policy framework and visionary projections of outcome of implementation. All forms of criticism of opponents excepting criticism of permitted content of electoral canvassing to be barred from election propaganda.
- Deployment of special police units equipped, ordered and empowered to arrest anyone bearing arms, to seize such vehicles in which such persons may be found travelling or in which arms are found, and to disarm any such armed person who may resist arrest.
- The election commissioner be empowered to immediately arrest, detain and prosecute politicians who interfere with the law and order apparatus during elections.
- Election monitors to be empowered to observe polls and canvassing, to document violations of election laws, to monitor prosecution of those who violate election laws, and to recommend changes in such laws as may from time to time seem to be necessary.

It is very clear that the history of this island following its independence is a history of a violent and brutal descent towards barbarity. Many of those who wish to see this process reversed voted for the Peoples Alliance platform of peace, Democracy and the defence of Human Rights.

However the credibility of its commitment to the establishment of peace, democracy and the defence of human rights however has come under intense scrutiny and critical review following its failure or refusal to prevent the pattern of violence so clearly evident at the recently concluded polls.

Despite this setback the visionary bankruptcy of the opposition makes it possible for the Peoples Alliance to retain its position as the vehicle commanding the most amount of political credibility with regard to the realisation of the islands potential.

Those who placed their trust in the Peoples Alliance platform of peace democracy and the defence of human rights - many of whom served actively and with great dedication on the several organisations that monitored the recent elections, therefore must not lose heart but must formulate and advance strategies that can counter the sad reversals they have seen.

The fact that the Peoples Alliance Government has created a context wherein the democratic process has been strengthened and most recognised human rights can be exercised and that it is precisely this context that the Peoples Alliance has created that makes it possible to commit the above to writing and seek publication must be both acknowledged and appreciated. It is this context that makes it possible to hope that the Peoples Alliance Government will move swiftly to ensure that such a situation does not arise at any future election.

What is sought by all those who worked actively to bring the Peoples Alliance to power is the creation of a space for the emergence of an awareness and acceptance of the need to discard political competition based on violence, coercion and brutality in favour of more sophisticated and civilised forms of competition and the consequent formulation and adoption of measures that will ensure that political parties remove from their ranks all persons who have committed, or permitted the committing of violence so that we need no longer fear being held hostage to the primitive instincts of goondahs and their criminal gangs who seek to pass themselves off as politicians and take control of the state. ●

Myth of Pan-Dravidian Identity in Tatters

T N Gopalan

Nineteen Tamils posted to the Accountant General's office in Bangalore could not take charge because of opposition from the Kannadigas, 48 persons taken into custody on suspicion of collaborating with sandalwood smuggler Veerappan are languishing in the Karnataka prisons for years now, scores looking for jobs in Malaysia have been interned, the Rameswaram fishermen are periodically felled by the bullets from the Lankan navy.... Oh what indeed is happening to the Tamil community, cried in anguish Chief Minister Karunanidhi the other day in the state Assembly.

"But we are not going to keep quiet....we'll do whatever we can to help out the Tamils in distress," he declared, raising his voice. But pray what is his game plan in the face of such gross injustice?

"I am wondering whether all political parties here should jointly observe a "Save Tamils' day..," he said, for starters of course.

That was in mid-Feb. But since then nothing has happened. Neither the Tamil refugees in Malaysia have been rescued nor the Tamils released from the Karnataka prisons nor yet the youngsters have been able to take up their postings. On the other hand neither Karunanidhi nor his chief rival Jayalalitha seems to be in any particular hurry to do anything about the situation.

The plight of such varied categories is a revealing commentary on the Tamil polity in general not to speak of the sheer incompetence and callousness of the so-called leaders of the community.

The case of the Tamil boys posted to the Karnataka office of the Accountant General of India is yet another striking instance of the increasing parochialism in the Indian union, with no one in any position to do anything to defuse the situation.

The Union Public Service Commission periodically recruits persons for clerical level postings in various central government establishments on the basis of written tests.

Twentythree of them thus selected were posted to the Bangalore office of the AG. That was a couple of months ago. As it happened all the 23 are Tamils. While only four of them managed to take charge, the rest are still cooling their heels in the face of some fierce protest by the Kannadigas.

The agitation went on for over 40 days. One of the union leaders, Richard Louis, who incidentally is fluent in Tamil, rationalised the agitation this way: "Of the 3,800 employees in this region, as many as 2000 can speak in Tamil. We have nothing against the Tamils or their language. The point is the nature of the job is such that the staff are to go on periodical auditing to district and taluk offices. And there the accounts are all maintained only in Kannada. How could the Tamils be expected to do a proper job of it? In 1981 85 Keralites were appointed to our offices and then too we agitated and we got the orders rescinded...why can't they appoint Kannadigas to these postings? Nine such were selected but they have been posted to New Delhi...this is very unfair to us besides the Tamils too would like to serve in their native state..."

Many Kannada leading lights including film actors and writers jumped into the fray and waxed eloquent on the rights of the sons of the soil.

The Union Minister for Civil Aviation, Ananda Kumar, from Karnataka, a BJP man and former Prime Minister Deve Gowda joined hands to impress upon the Centre the need to "set right the injustice done to the Kannadigas." Finally the Union Government caved in.

Ironically it was a minister from Tamil Nadu, Kadambur Janardhanam, in the Ministry of Personnel, who cancelled the postings for 19 Tamils. The agitationists were prevailed upon to leave in peace the four who had already joined duty.

Karunanidhi made full use of the opportunity to hit at the "lack of commitment for the Tamil cause on the part of the AIADMK" and shed profuse tears for the plight of the Tamils the world over.

Janardhanam responded with a weak defence saying that anyway those originally posted would not be left in the lurch and that they would be distributed among the other offices of the AG in Karnataka.

And worse the Chief Minister also disclosed that the regional director of the UPSC at Madras, Ms.Shubhadra Narayanan could not even go to her Bangalore office and she had received telephonic threats saying that her daughter would be kidnapped and so on. For the more fanatical among the Kannadigas held her responsible for the posting of the Tamils to Bangalore.

Chauvinism has been growing in Karnataka by leaps and bounds in the last decade or so. And if Cauvery affair is in such a terrible mess today that is more because of the fanatics over there than anything else. And the saner sections refuse to speak out.

Deccan Herald, a leading English daily of Bangalore, reported on March 1, "The three-day 67th Kannada Sahitya Sammelan which concluded here today resolved that persons without the knowledge of Kannada should not be appointed to any Central government offices in Karnataka.

The sammelan chaired by noted Kannada novelist S L Bhyrappa welcomed the Centre's decision to cancel the appointment of 23 non-Kannadigas to the AG's office in Bangalore following a 40-day agitation by pro-Kannada organisations. It opposed the Centre's move to re-deploy them in other Central government offices in Bangalore." There was no note of disapproval either in the report or any editorial admonition either.

Chief Minister J.H.Patel in an interview felt that those selected could be accommodated in Tamil Nadu. He too cited the fact that accounts were being maintained in Kannada language.

"But what harm if those selected are trained in Kannada language? After all in every state there are those from out of that place serving there at various levels and who manage to learn the local language in course of time...." One would get only evasive replies to such pointed questions.

But the case of those detained under the notorious Terrorist and Anti-Disruptive Activities Act (TADA) is much more heart-rending. They had been taken into custody in the early nineties by the Karnataka Task Force for such assorted crimes ranging from serving food to the Veerappan gang to acting as informants.

Most of them, numbering 48 at the moment, are said to be innocent and had been picked up merely on suspicion, their only crime being that they lived in areas frequented by Veerappan. Neither the cases against them would be pursued nor would they be released. Repeated representations to the Karnataka authorities have been made in, but in vain.

In fact one of Veerappan's long time demands has been the release of the Tamils in Karnataka prisons.

The plight of those who go in search of the El Dorado abroad, Malaysia or Singapore, taken for a royal ride by the brokers and left to fend for themselves is nothing new. Only the situation has become acute in the wake of the South East Asian crisis of the recent years. For all their crocodile tears, no Chief Minister cares to regulate the trafficking in human cargo.

Whether it is those trapped in Malaysia or the perennially suffering Rameswaram fishermen, we only hear empty rhetoric and nothing concrete is ever done. Such is the level of commitment of the Tamil leaders.

If none of the issues bedevilling the relationship between the two neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, Cauvery or the others mentioned earlier, could be sorted out amicably, could the Kannada chauvinists alone be blamed for the sorry state of affairs?

After all was it not, and perhaps it still is the case, the Dravidian movement which, in the name of asserting the ethnic identity, went overboard, assumed menacing postures at times and more generally stuck to fierce rhetoric, thus setting an example to other ethnic groupings?

A Karunanidhi might have sobered up a bit after realising to his cost that playing the Tamil card would not help him win the game against the Kerala-born MGR, a Jayalalitha might have altogether jettisoned the Tamil plank for purely opportunistic reasons and even the likes of Dr. Ramdas and Vai.Ko. could, with some misgivings though, rub shoulders with the Hindi zealots. Still everyone of them does take up, quite aggressively at that, the Tamil nationalist cause when it suits him or her.

In fact a Tamil weekly Nandan which prides itself of being the vehicle of purest and uncompromising Tamil nationalism, LTTE supremo Prabhakaran being one of its godheads, came out with a scurrilous attack on the Kannadigas after the AG's office episode came to light.

"Kannada, unakku yennada ingu velai?" - Kannadigas, you have no business to be here, it said and warned them all to clear out of the Tamil land.

There are fringe groups like Thamizh-Thamizhar Iyakkam which tilts at the Northerners periodically.

If a Vattal Nagaraj or actor Rajkumar follow suit over there in Karnataka, do the Tamils have any moral authority to blame them? Every section in the country wants to have a greater share of the cake for itself, and as the eco-

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BOOK REVIEW

Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited

Volume II

Editor: Michael Roberts: Marga Institute, Colombo, 1998. pp 452 (and preface)

Review by Sasanka Perera
(Department of Sociology, University of Colombo)

Sri Lanka Collective Identities Revisited (Vol II) edited by Michael Roberts consists of 15 essays in varying degrees of quality, mostly written by academics with an interest in Sri Lanka working or studying abroad. It also contains an editor's preface which the editor correctly calls Meanderings Amidst Heightened Moments." In a way, the present volume is the second of a two part reincarnation of a collection of influential essays originally published in 1979 as Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka also edited by Michael Roberts. Of the 15 essays in the present volume, those by C R de Silva, Michael Roberts and S Arasaratnam are reprints from the 1979 version. Some of the remaining essays have either been published before elsewhere or have been presented in various conferences. In other words, some of the ideas presented in these essays have been circulating among Sri Lankan or Sri Lanka oriented academic circles for some time. In general, my comments would be mostly focused on some of the essays appearing in this volume for the first time, in which I would attempt to introduce the readers to the main arguments of the essays rather than making a detailed critical review, in the conventional academic sense.

At the outset I should also note that given the significance of the issues dealt with in the three essays reproduced from the 1979 edition, it could have made much more sense for the authors to add pertinent contemporary or recent material and reformulate their work, rather than publishing them merely as essays of historical significance or artifacts from academic production from a previous period. Thus Michael Roberts' Nationalism in Economic and Social Thought, 1915-1945 , C R de Silva's The Impact of Nationalism on Education: The Schools Takeover (1961) and The University Admissions Crisis, 1970-75" and S Arasaratnam's Nationalism in Sri Lanka and Tamils" seem like essays that are encapsulated in a time capsule where socio-political developments of the last two to five decades have not been dealt with despite the fact that such information is readily available, and in need of analysis not merely for academic consumption but for purposes of intervention as well. If such an effort was made, their work would have been of much more relevant to the contemporary concerns.

In chapter 5, in an essay entitled Pushing Poson" Jonathan Walters writes about the politics of religion in the context of Poson celebrations Sri Lankan Buddhists, an event that marks the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka through Arahat Mahinda. He describes the transformation of Arahat Mahinda into what he calls Mahinda the Nationalist" in the post 1950 period (1998:135). Prior to that, in the 19th century Walters suggests that there were two versions of Mahinda's co-existing among Sinhala Buddhists - Mahinda the Temple Preacher and Mahinda the Missionary (1998: 136-139). This transformation, he suggests, should be understood in the context of the political chances of the time since it reflects the way in which the post-colonial elite perceived and reacted to these changes (1998: 135). Walters also shows how the commemoration of Mahinda in Poson celebrations expanded rapidly since the early 20th century, gaining political momentum, particularly after independence in 1948. With reference to specific incidents up to the mid 1990's, he suggests that this process continues to date through many transformations (1998: 140-156). It is interesting to note the manner in which Poson has been turned into one of the most important national Buddhist celebrations by the press, particularly through the Lake House Group using its sponsorship of the aloko puja (honouring with light) during the main Poson celebrations in Mihintale (1998: 144). He also

(continued from page 24)

nomic situation gets grimmer progressively, the strife only increases.

Anyway the world over ethnic conflicts are only the order of the day. In such a situation for things to be different, some enlightened leadership is called for. If that is one commodity in short supply in Europe or Africa, it is much more so in India.

The left parties are slowly waking up to the bitter realities of the ethnic consciousness and are trying to reorient their perspectives and attitudes a little bit. But one cannot blame them too much. What can a Marxist in Punjab do in the face of an aggressive, even violent, Sikh assertion? He or she can make noises and leave it at that. At best one can refuse to be part of a sectarian agenda as many Lankan Tamils are doing. Beyond that those concerned can only keep campaigning in their own small ways and hope for the best.

To get back to the problem with which we started, the Dravidian unity lies in tatters. The much-vaunted Dravidian family including all the different language groupings of the South including the Kannadigas are daggers drawn at each other. There cannot be a more resounding repudiation of the pan-Dravidian identity.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the Dravidian movement which did play a crucial role in overthrowing the Brahmin Raj has, nevertheless, travelled a very perilous course since - harming not only the very Non-Brahmin communities it claimed to be serving but also inspired a variety of most undesirable forms of casteism and sectarianism, many of which are proving much more obtuse and dangerous than their notional progenitor. ●

describes the role played by politicians and archaeologists in the making of Mahinda the Nationalist to represent the modern Sinhala Buddhist nation (1998:151).

In Chapter 6 entitled Praxis, Language and Silences: The July 1987 Uprising of the JVP in Sri Lanka." Jani de Silva presents an essay on the second uprising of the JVP. Her analysis of the politics of the JVP is based on four elements which she believes are central to understanding the politics of the JVP. She has identified these key areas as the JVP's notion of social justice. Its notions of patriotism aud related dynamics, the role of violence in social struggle and issues of leadership (1998: 168-190). One of the key features of de Silva's essay is her attempt to base her work on scattered JVP material such as leaflets and tapes etc which are no longer easily accessible.

Much of the conventional academic wisdom suggests that the JVP ideology based on concerns over class and socialist aspirations in the late 1960's, was transformed into an ideology based on patriotism" in the late 1980's (1998: 164, 190). Contrary to this view, de Silva argues that despite the shift to a platform of patriotism, a preoccupation with social class remained a primary category of the JVP identity and politics.

Neloufer de Mel in her essay Agent or Victim: The Sri Lankan Woman Militant in the Interregnum" (Chapter 7) attempts to place in context the positionality of women militants in JVP and LTTE movements. She focuses on the manner in which their roles as militants have allowed them to transcend the limitations of conventional female identity and gender roles as that very process also imposes other forms of restrictions on them (1998: 200). Much of her ethnographic material comes from a conversation with a woman member of the JVP who was active in 1971 as well as poetry from Tamil women poets and LTTE literature. She points out that most of LTTE literature on women cadre, such as Adele Ann's book, Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers (1993), stresses the idea that the armed struggle is a departure from traditional restrictive gender roles imposed upon them by patriarchal society (1998: 202). Yet in other instances such alleged freedoms are clearly curbed by the LTTE itself (1998: 209). Such examples of empowerment" and simultaneous containment, de Mel points out, can be seen in the dynamics of both the JVP and the LTTE (1998: 199-217).

Referring to the experience of a JVP militant active in the JVP's first uprising in 1971, de Mel points out that her womanhood had been desexualised and her personal needs are placed secondary to the cause of her" struggle. The gender control that takes place in militant groups became most clear, as she points out, in the manner in which such organisations relegate emotional and sexual needs as merely personal and thus not a priority. It is also in this context that the female combatant's needs as a woman are never considered political needs" (1998: 213).

Clearly de Mel's essay is one of the first in Sri Lanka to seriously question the notion of empowerment of female combatants within militant groups while also focusing on the containment strategies which the membership in such organisations entail. Such problematic and uncritical notions of empowerment emanate not only from the LTTE propaganda, but also from tracts that pass as academic discourse. On the other hand, given the importance of the issues de Mel is dealing with, her arguments could have been made much stronger and more convincing had she talked to women combatants of the JVP's second and much more brutal uprising in the late 1980's as well as LTTE female combatants. However, in the context of the secrecy of the LTTE and the restricted access to its members the possibility of conducting research with the latter is much easier said than done.

In chapter 8, Pradeep Jeganathan presents an interesting and readable essay entitled All the Lord's Men? Ethnicity and Inequality in the Space of a Riot." Based on this fieldwork in an area south of Colombo. Jeganathan attempts to find certain similarities or comparisons between the anti-Tamil violence of July 1983 and the 1992 floods of Colombo. As Jeganathan points out, these comparisons emerge out of the experiential qualities of the two events. Much of that experience is based on the suddenness" and the extraordinariness" of the two events (1998: 227-228). The other aspect of this comparison relates to the issue of property. In both events property in the words of Jeganathan stood seriously challenged" (1998: 228). In both moments the boundaries between these spaces disintegrated. To Jeganathan the flood is a tracing of the riot" (1998: 229).

Through a number of conversations with some of his neighbours Jeganathan brings out a series of recollections about the riot, particularly focused on the fate that befell a Tamil family living in the neighbourhood. Through these recollections it becomes clear that the violence directed against this family had much more to do with other issues than their mere Tamilness. For instance, the partial destruction of the house that the family had rented from a Sinhala had nothing to do with their Tamilness but with the sense of inequality some of the rioters" felt in their relationships with the owner of the house. In these recollections one could also find how a family which was once popular in the neighbourhood despite their Tamilness became demonised over their reaction to one particular incident prior to the July violence, and how the violence directed against them was justified in recollections after the event in which they were considered aloof, distant, different and so on (1998: 221-242). Jeganathan, in his analysis of the floods of 1992 as a tracing of the violence of July 1983 has successfully brought into sharp focus many issues such as concerns over inequality, and differential recollections of memory, often hidden in the discourse on ethnicity and violence in Sri Lanka.

In chapter 9, Mark Whittaker presents a paper which he has called Learning Politics from Taraki: A Biographical Fragment . Whittaker presents an interesting but a somewhat larger than life picture of a former Tamil militant from the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Elam (PLOTE), whom he has identified as Taraki. He introduces Taraki in an amazing array of manifestations: Tamil separatist guerrilla, sailor, jungle guide, party theorist, export businessman, published historian, philosopher and journalist.

The essay is based on a series of conversations Whittaker has had with Taraki in the eastern Sri Lankan

town of Batticaloa in 1984 (1998: 249-265). In his essay Whittaker presents numerous views Taraki has on society and the politics he is familiar with, based on what Taraki has learnt from experience as well as his own readings and interpretations of selected ideas from Chomsky, Foucault, Gramsci and so on. But one particular theme that clearly emerges from the conversations that Whittaker has reproduced and in some cases presented in summarised form is Taraki's critique of formal anthropology and university based knowledge production (1998: 247-265) - As Whittaker recounts, Taraki takes issue with Whittaker's assertions of professional neutrality" because the prevailing political conditions demanded engaged action" (1998: 248). Of course, issues of anthropological neutrality as well as the possibility of objectivity in the practice of anthropology have been debated for quite some time in international academic discourse, even though that debate has not touched the Sri Lankan academic or popular discourse in any real sense. It appears that to Taraki, conventional anthropological practice, if uninvolved , was merely a discourse that has no real purpose. The following words from Taraki places this sentiment in perspective:

Why am I going off tomorrow to get my hands dirty, when a normal anthropologist, equally a repository of knowledge, would simply go back to his desk and write articles for university press publications . (1998: 258)

Clearly, Taraki has a point. And, he is also simplistic in this particular critique. He has a point in the sense that the Sri Lankan academics in general not simply anthropologists are notoriously non-interventionist when it comes to taking a stand with regard to tenuous political issues. That is one reason why Sri Lankan social sciences in the formal sense and social intervention in general are marked by an extreme sense of mediocrity.

He is simplistic in the sense that one cannot expect every individual to be a larger than life hero in situations of political and social instability as is the case in Sri Lanka, particularly in the context of prevailing practical difficulties, which are far from the ideal. For example, taking a clear stand in support of Tamil separatism (however legitimate it may seem to be) could ensure that state restrictions may he imposed on local anthropologists while foreign ones nay find it difficult to get a visa to do their fieldwork next time around. Similarly, a critique of LTTE polities could mean that an anthropologist could get her hands so dirtied that she may not get an LTTE visa" to enter areas under the movement's control. Besides, different individuals 'get their hands dirty" in different ways, while all such efforts may not be as spectacular as becoming a guerrilla, a philosopher, a published historian or whatever despite its limitations however, the aspect of Taraki's critique as outlined above are important Since such a critique is necessary, but has not yet come from seats of academic production within the country where a critical self-evaluation of the relevance of contemporary academic production is urgently needed.

Patricia Lawrence in chapter 10 writes about the work of oracles in eastern Sri Lanka in a situation where extensive political violence marked by fear and lack of trust has, according to her, silenced conventional means of mourning (1998: 271-275). Moreover, individuals were not able to take their problems to government authorities since some agents of that government in the form of military and police forces were responsible for much of the violence they experienced. Even though the almost complete silencing of conventional mourning implied by Lawrence is not present in the routine realities of eastern Sri Lanka, it is quite clear that modes of mourning, expression of emotion in the context of political violence and methods of coping with trauma have certainly undergone significant transformations as a result of the war as well as in response to it. It is then in this context that her descriptions of the role of oracles in amman cults become important. According to Lawrence, people's emotional outpouring in local amman temples overcomes political silencing which has occurred under conditions of war (1998: 274).

The role of the oracles become more relevant and legitimised given the fact that many of them are also touched by the same violence that had been experienced by their clients. Their advice to the clients varies from asserting that the violence they had experienced would happen again. Suggesting to mothers that they should not give up hope for the sake of their children irrespective of the violence they may have personally experienced (1998: 279). It is significant that in the southern part of Sri Lanka also a similar process of oracular intervention as well as expectations of demonic and divine intervention in delivering justice and revenge became popular in a situation when mechanisms of secular justice and law and order failed with the expansion of political violence in the south in the late 1980's. While the issues that Lawrence address - the problems of mourning and coping with trauma - are important issues in sites of violence including eastern Sri Lanka, her essay would have benefited much had she introduced additional ethnographic material from her fieldwork.

In chapter 12 Sankaran Krishna presents an interesting essay on "Divergent Narratives: Dravidian and Elamist Tamil Nationalisms." Krishna argues that contrary to popular perception in both India and Sri Lanka. Tamil Elamist nationalism in Sri Lanka and what he calls Dravidian nationalism of Tamil Nadu were not in dialogue and had completely different contexts of origin, and the reasons for their emergence were different from each other (1998: 319).

But Krishna suggests that the matter in which Tamil leadership in Sri Lanka looked towards India for help in the context of worsening ethnic politics in Sri Lanka has quite a bit to do with the Indian intervention in Bangladesh in 1971. According to him the emergence of Bangladesh pushed Sri Lankan Tamils further along the road to Elam, believing in its achievability while it also exaggerated their expectations of the Indian central government on behalf of their cause (1998: 339, 341). The Bangladesh situation also marked a more aggressive Indian external policy towards its troublesome neighbours, a model India used later on in Sri Lanka

to bring around the Jayewardene regime more in tune with Indian policy. As he points out, in India the Bangladesh situation was interpreted as indicating the tremendous foreign policy implications "that could accrue from intervention in neighbouring countries by utilising beleaguered minorities to further regional hegemony" (1998: 341). After the 1980's, with the worsening of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, Tamil Nadu politics also adopted the cause of Sri Lankan Tamils as one of its agendas, which only changed after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE. In the end, according to Krishna, it was because of the perception of the intimacy of these two nationalisms that the Indian army fought its longest war - in Sri Lanka (1998: 340-341).

In general, I would have very little to say about the remainder of the book. A Jeyaratnam Wilson's brief essay entitled, Politics of Ethnicity and Ethno-nationalisms in Asia" as the title itself suggests attempts to paint a broad picture of ethnicity and ethnic based nationalisms in Asia. But such an enterprise clearly was not possible in the 9 pages that Wilson had devoted to it, and in the end what purpose this essay plays in this volume is not clear to me. It would have been better off in a magazine. Charles Sarvan, in chapter 14 presents a short story entitled An Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi" which is a fictional account of the thoughts and activities of the woman suicide bomber of the LTTE who assassinated Gandhi. In the story the unnamed woman assassin perceives her action as a marriage in which she embraces death as she garlands her bridegroom (1998: 357-361). Chapter 15 consists of a very long essay by Godfrey Gunatilleke entitled, The Ideologies and Realities of the Ethnic Conflict - A Postface". In the 57 pages Gunatilleke has devoted to his rather unilinear description of the emergence of ethnic conflict, its development, and its present position (in his view) offers a generalised description of a very complex process, and much of its complexities tend to disappear beyond the margins of Gunatilleke's essay. But it still serves the purpose of a general outline for those who are pressed for time, but are nevertheless interested in understanding" the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict.

Finally, despite the kind of shortcomings I have briefly outlined above, the present volume marks yet another significant contribution to the realm of knowledge production in the Sri Lankan academia. But unfortunately that knowledge - as typified by this book - continues to be published in a language most Sri Lankans would not be able to read even though they deal with issues which at least some of them should know about and think about. One hopes that Marga, as the publisher would consider bringing out at least some of the more useful essays in this volume in Sinhala and Tamil in the not so distant future. ●

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Regina Rajanayagam

An Appreciation

The passing away of Regina on Wednesday 10 February 1999 after her brief illness was a shock to many and to her kith and kin a profound and irreplacable loss. When one refers to her kith and kin, it is not restricted to her blood relatives only. To Regina and her husband Raj, everyone who had the fortune of coming near to them became their kith and kin.

Regina was born in Mannar in northern Sri Lanka and from very early on in her life she became a very deeply devoted and committed religious person. Regina's comitment to the service of ordinary people was reflected in her choosing nursing as her career - a noble profession which fitted her gentle and service-oriented character and gave her the chance to to devote the best in her for the welfare of the larger humanity.

Regina was trained and qualified as a Staff Nurse in Ireland in the mid-sixties; thereafter she worked for a short period in Switzerland in a hospital run by Catholic missionaries; then she travelled to South India and in Kerala did her post-graduate diploma in mid-wifery. Regina returned to Sri Lanka, worked in Jaffna and then in Colombo as a Theatre Sister. Her urge to become accomplished in her chosen profession again made her to travel to the UK in 1972 to undertake post-graduate training in Theatre Technique, and from then on she had been working in the National Health Service until she fell ill.

After helping thousands of patients day and night to cope with the demands of illness, she herself faced her own illness bravely and beautifully with her solid faith, calm acceptance and unassuming smile. Her religious commitment and devotion made her to go on pilgrimages to Rome, the Holy Land and only a few months before passing away to Medjugorje in Bosnia and Velankanni in India following which she intensified her devotion to Our Lady and Her Rosary. Her last moments, we are told by those who were at the bedside, were spent sinking herself into prayer and sacred music. What a beautiful flight from a painful world into Eternity!

My wife and I came to know Regina from the time she married Raj, who was staying with us in Colombo

until he migrated to the UK. They were very much attached to our family, especially to our children. Regina was instrumental in taking Sharmini, our eldest daughter, with her to the UK and Raj and Regina looked after her more than a parent would. Our children, especially Sharmini and her family in London, were very fondly loved and cared for by them. Though they did not have children of their own, they showered their love and concern far and wide on all those who were in need.

Regina's husband came from a Hindu background with a secular left-oriented political outlook while Regina was from an orthodox Catholic background with a deep sense of devotion to her religious obligations. During our visits to the UK we have seen closely how the two, Raj and Regina, were bound by a strong mutual commitment to each other that showed no difficulty whatsoever in remaining deeply united as one in spite of their differences in origin and God-given-gifts. She was married, not to an ardent believer or an orthodox Catholic, but to a great respector of persons of other beliefs and ideologies. Raj did all he could to help Regina fulfill her religious and social obligations.

Raj and Regina made a beautiful and harmonious unity out of their diverse gifts. With Raj, busy as he has always been, employed as a full-time lawyer, editing a monthly journal and devoting most of his time and resources in serving the oppressed and the needy and in the cause of human and democratic rights for over three decades, Regina had a serene service of love and sacrifice to perform behind the scenes feeling proud of her husband's work. In addition to her demanding duties in the National health Service, she spent a lot of time in keeping a beautiful home ever ready and willing to receive and host the variety of visitors to their home.

Regina's last visit to Sri Lanka was in September 1998. Probably knowing that she had to take farewell from her dear ones, she made a planned visit to her sister, brothers and their families who are in India having been displaced by violence from their homes in Mannar in the late 1980s. She spent almost a month with her dear ones whose welfare was one of her life-long main pre-occupation.

Regina, a strict disciplinarian by character, she carried the discipline into her own personal life and with great patience helped others, including Raj, achieve it. She showed her unassuming love for the others by her simple and transparent ways. Her candid remarks were always healing to others. After lavishing visitors with her hospitality of superb dishes and jokes, not allowing political discussions or differences to warm up, she would turn to music as an instrument of harmony. With a strong pent for music she would play old melodies vigorously on the piano. Not given to gossip or idle talk or diplomatic double-speak, she never hesitated to call a spade a spade.

The way she cared for and accepted her husband and his world of interests, the way she devotedly spent herself in giving credible expression to a strong but hidden service of love to others, the way she took her farewell though painful yet in a melodious way - all these leave us wondering how fortunate we all were in having known her and experienced in Regina a unique expression of divine love. May that Divine be her eternal reward.

In Regina's death, we have lost a sincere and much loved friend. May her soul find solace in peace and may the turf lie lightly over her. We sincerely pray that God would grant Raj the strength to accept the loss and the courage to face the future with equanimity and fortitude.

By J S Bastiampillai, Sri Lanka
(Edited by Fr S J Emmanuel)

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17/03/1999

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The "River House", 12A Lee High Road, Lewisham, SE13, purchased at a cost of £140,000, is the only free hold property the London Sivan Kovil Trust owns and it is adjacent to the building which houses the Sivan Temple itself. This forms a part of the Temple Complex.

This building once renovated will be used as a multipurpose community centre, providing facilities for Social, Cultural and Educational activities, such as conducting classes in Languages, Religion, Music and Culture. This community centre is designed to support the temple activities and help the community at large, being in the Sivan Temple Complex.

The main hall on the ground floor is designed to accommodate an audience of three hundred, with stage, lighting and public address system and could cater for wedding ceremonies, music concerts and cultural and religious meetings. The first floor of this building which consists of five large rooms will be used for educational purposes including computer classes and library facilities.

In the Phase I stage of renovation, the structural alterations of the building were completed at a cost of £50,000. The Phase II stage of renovation, just initiated, is estimated to cost around £150,000. This will provide improved facilities, including new electrical and central heating systems for the whole building. A part of this cost (£50,000) has been funded by the trustees.

We appeal to devotees and well-wishers for help to finance this project either by a lump-sum donation or by providing standing order to the Trust. **Donation** to be made by Cheque drawn in the name of **"London Sivan Kovil Trust-Building Account". A standing order form** with details of credit is also enclosed to facilitate your contribution.

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Uncle *seeks medical doctor for Hindu niece, medical student final year in US, 25. Send horoscopes, details and telephone number. M 1094 c/o Tamil Times.*

Uncle *invites horoscope of bride overseas or Sri Lanka for nephew, 35, vegetarian, B.Com (Madras), Hotel Management Degree (UK). M 1095 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu *seeks professional partner for computer professional brother, 31, British/Australian citizen. Send details, horoscope. M 1096 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek professional groom in good employment for daughter, 26, Dental Surgeon working in London. Send horoscope, details. M 1097 c/o Tamil Times.*

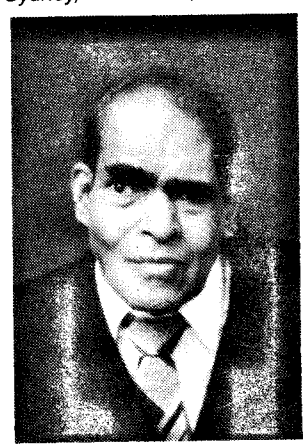
Jaffna Hindu parents *seek qualified partner in UK employment for daughter, 41, permanent resident, innocent divorcee, no encumbrances. Write with details. Confidentiality assured. M 1098 c/o Tamil Times.*

OBITUARIES

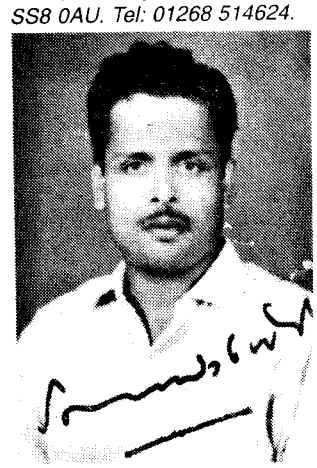
Mrs. Lalithambal Sandrasekeram *(72) beloved wife of Mr. K. Sandrasekeram, retired Headquarters Inspector of Co-op Societies of Sri Lanka; loving mother of Dr. Parameswaran (Canada), Jegatheswaran (Australia), Sathanantheswaran, Dr. Premachandran, Vasanthy and Ravichandran (London); loving sister of Dr. Rajaratnam (Sri Lanka), Mahalingasivam (Germany), late Neelambigai, Shanthy; loving mother-in-law of Dr. Charmaine, Sugi (Austalia), Gowri and Dhamayanthi; sister-in-law of Kirupamani and Ketharagowry; loving grandmother of Lakshmi, Sharmila, Sumi, Sasha, Prassana, Sathes and Denesh passed away peacefully after a brief illness on 28th January 1999 and was cremated at Mortlake Cemetery, Richmond on 30th January.*

The members of her family wish to express their sincere thanks to all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy and assisted them in several ways during this period of great sorrow. - 37 Grove Road, Ealing, London W5 5DS. Tel: 0181 840 3243.

Sakthiammal *(82) wife of the late S.R. Kanaganayagam, Senator and Advocate of Jaffna, passed away peacefully, after a brief illness, in Sydney on 27th February 1999. She was a deeply religious and mild mannered lady, well loved by all who came to know her. Caring and charitable, her death leaves a void not easy to fill. She leaves behind her three children, Savitri Devi (Sydney), Kanag-Isvaran (Colombo) and Maheswaran (Sydney), nine grand children, a great grandson; son-in-law Dr. A. Balasubramaniam (Sydney); daughter-in-law Soori-akumari (Sydney) and countless number of relatives and friends across the continents. The funeral took place in Sydney on 2nd March 1999. - 12 Fitzwilliam Road, Valucluse, Sydney, NSW 2030, Australia.*



Mr. S. Kandiah, *former Chemistry Teacher, Hartley College, Point Pedro, former Chemistry Lecturer, Jaffna College, Vaddukoddai and retired Lecturer, Department of Chemistry, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka; son of the late Mr. & Mrs. Sithamparapillai of Puloly South, Point Pedro; beloved husband of Gnaneswary, retired teacher, St. John's Academy, Jaffna; loving father of Suhanya, Aravindan (Canada) and Ahalya (Madras); father-in-law of Ramachandra, Anne Glory (both of Canada), and Siva Sakthynathan (Madras); brother of Subramaniam, Thangammah (Sri Lanka), Dr. Kanapathipillai (UK), Pakkiam (Sri Lanka), Sangarapillai (Botswana), Sellamah, Sinnammah and Sivakolunthu (Sri Lanka); brother-in-law of Kalavalli, Pankayatchelvi, Bala Shanmugam, Parameswary, Kathiravelu (Sri Lanka) and Sivapalan (UK) passed away in Madras on 31.1.99. - Dr. S. Kanapathipillai, 2 Cleveland Road, Canvey Island, Essex SS8 0AU. Tel: 01268 514624.*



Mr. Kanagasabai Jeyasingham *(65), Retired Engineer, Ford Motor Company (UK), beloved husband of Saraswathy; loving father of Nirmala, Gajendran, Mala and Nalini; father-in-law of Surendran, Rejitha and Rajkumar; loving grandfather of Breman and Janahan; brother of the late Mrs. S. Parameswari, Mrs. S. Pushpeswari, and Mrs. S. Puwanendeswary of Navindil and brother of Mr. K. Vidhuasingham (UK) passed away peacefully on 5th March 1999. Funeral took place according to Hindu rites on 9th March at City of London Crematorium.*

The members of the family thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, paid floral tributes, sent messages of sympathy and assisted them during the period of great sorrow. - 67 De Vere Gardens, Ilford, Essex IG1 3EF.

IN MEMORIAM
Our Beloved
Daddy Mummy
Ponnampalam Vemalaranee
Kanagaratnam Kanagaratnam
Born 11.10.1908 10.7.1923

Rest: 2.3.1982 31.3.90

Gently with love your memory is kept
Your affection and kindness
We will never forget
You both are always in our thoughts
And for ever in our hearts.

Remembered with love and affection by sons Sara, Brem and Dubsy; daughters-in-law Lalitha and Shyamala; and grandchildren Janarthan, Mehala, Uthistran, Arani and Anuja. - 19 Huxley Place, Palmers Green, London N13 5SU. Tel: 0181 886 5966.

Second Death Anniversary

Dr. C. Perumal Pillai
16th February 1920
- 2nd March 1997

Appa

Two years have gone by, since you left our midst. Your loving care and inspiration are strongly missed. In your peace we find solace.

Your ever loving children Ravi, Usha, Jeeva and Ranjit and families.

IN MEMORIAM
Pradeep Jeganathan

Second Anniversary - 31.03.1999

Chooti, it's two years since the day you left us
And not a day goes by that we don't think of you.
We miss all the great times we had together;
You will always be in our hearts for ever.
A million happy memories
Won't mend our broken hearts
For on this day two years ago
Our whole world fell apart.
Our secret tears still flow
For what it meant to lose you
Chooti, no one will ever know.

Sadly missed and affectionately remembered by your parents, sister, brothers, in-laws, niece and nephews. - Jeganathan family, 6A Cambrai Avenue, Mount Roskill, Auckland 1004 New Zealand.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Apr 2 *Good Friday; Feast of St Francis.*
Apr 3 *South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Drop in. Tel: 0181 542 3285.*
Apr 4 *Sankadahara Sathurthi.*
Apr 7 *Sasdi; Feast of St John.*
Apr 10 *9.30 a.m. Tamil Union Sports Club conducts Seventh Annual Badminton Tournament for Boys, Girls, Men, Ladies & those over 40 and 50. For details Tel: Evenings 0181 385 7453 (Umachandran)/ 0181 551 1342 (Bala)*
Apr 11 *Feast of St Stanislaus.*
Apr 12 *Eekathasi.*
Apr 13 *Pirathosam; Feast of St Martin.*
Apr 14 *Dawn of Pramathi Hindu New Year.*
Apr 15 *Amavasai.*
Apr 17 *Tamil Youth Centre presents 'Ilaya Natchathirangal', Variety Entertainment including Band, Dances, Comedy and Fashion Show at Logan Hall, London W1. Tel: 0181 908 2646.; SLTWG New Year Celebrations, Tel: 0181 542 3285.*
Apr 18 *Karthigai; 9.30 a.m. Tamil Schools Sports Association (TSSA UK) 7-A-Side Football Tournament for Adults, U 16, U 14, U 12 and Net ball Tournament for U 16s. For details Tel: 0181 241 5881/ 01293 407 586.*
Apr 19 *Sathurthi.*
Apr 21 *Sasdi.*
Apr 23 *Feast of St George.*
Apr 24 *SLTWG Drop in. Tel: 0181 542 3285.*
Apr 25 *Feast of St Mark; 12.30 p.m. SCOT Annual Lunch with Guest Speaker at Greenford Town Hall, Ruislip Road, Greenford. For details & tickets Tel: 0181 904 9227/ 952 7249.*
Apr 26 *Eekathasi.*
Apr 27 *Pirathosam.*
Apr 29 *Feast of St Catherine of Siene.*
Apr 30 *Full Moon; 6.30 p.m. Illustrated Lecture by Seneke Bandaranayake on* **Ivan Peries Paintings 1938-88** *at Lecture Theatre, London School of Oriental & African Studies, Russell Sq., London WCI. Admission Free.*
At Bhavan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HG, Tel: 0171 381 3086/4068
Apr 2 to 4 *Three-Day Ayurveda Seminar*
Apr 16 *7.30 p.m. Karnatic Music Workshop by Karaikudi. R. Mani, open to all, donations welcome.*
Apr 24 *5.30 pm Talk on New Discoveries in Indian History by V.S.Godbole. All welcome.*
Apr 24 *6.30 p.m. Tyagaraja Jayanti - Bhavan's Karnatic Vocal, Vina, Violin and Mridangam teachers and students pay homage to Saint Tyagaraja. All welcome.*

Author of Tamil Research Book Honoured

Dr G.Rajendran, *Professor of Tamil at Madras Christian College, Madras, who authored the new book,* **'The Tamil Root Kal, the World Over'** *chosen as the best book in Tamil in the ethnological field was honoured by the Tamil Nadu Government at a colourful ceremony attended by Tamil scholars and Tamil national leaders. Kalaignam M.Karunanithy, Chief Minister of Madras presented the award.*

Though there are several words in the languages of the world, the number of root words in each of them is very limited. The author contends that the Tamil word Kal is one such important root and examines those words that have sprung from it. However, what is significant is his argument that there are a number of words both in the East and the West that have come from the Tamil words, which have themselves been derived from Kal. The author goes on to prove how Kal becomes the root word for several words in Chinese and in Austro-African aboriginal languages.

The book published by the Ratnam Foundation, London is available from its office at 179 Norval Road, North Wembley, Middx HAO 3SX for £5.

Winner of Commonwealth Science Award

Mr S.Ratnakumar, *a Sri Lankan Science teacher in Seychelles has won the prestigious Commonwealth Association of Science, Technology and Mathematics Educators award for his project" Bio-Gas not just Technology"*

The picture above shows Mr Ratnakumar flanked on the left by Dr Ved God, Secretary of the Association and Dr Cream Wright, Head of Education of the Commonwealth Secretariat on the right at the award ceremony held at the Secretariat in London.

Mr Ratnakumar, who hails from Kokuvil, is an old student of St Sylvesters College and a former teacher of Trinity College, Kandy. He wins this award for the second time.

Maha Kumbabishekam

Sri Raja Rajeswary Amman Temple, Dell Lane, Stoneleigh, Surrey KTI7 2NE.

The Maha Kumbabishekam (Grand Consecration/Opening Ceremony) of the Sri Raja Rajeswary Amman Temple on 5th April 1999 heralds a new milestone in the history of temples in the United Kingdom. Built in immaculate, classical South Indian architecture, the Sri Raja Rajeswary Amman Temple will be the first ornate Shakkthi Temple in Europe.

The grand consecration commencing on Wednesday, 3lst March with the Ganapathy Homam extends through various phases to the culmination of the final consecration on Monday, 5th April 1999

The Raja Rajeswary Amman Temple is dedicated to SHAKKTHI the ever powerful latent Energy goddess and consort of Lord Shiva, the almighty. Taking abode with the Mother will be Lord Ganapathy and Thiruchenthur Murugan, brought to London in 1973 to pioneer and steer the Hindu religious mission in Europe. The temple complex studded with a spacious concert/wedding hall, yoga-meditation mandapam, priest quarters and public facilities will be the first temple to incorporate regular yoga paths with cultural programmes for both children and senior citizens. The ceremonies commence at 9.30 a.m. on Wednesday 31.3.99 continuing everyday till about 10 p.m. with the Maha Kumbabishekam timed between 9.48 and 10.48 a.m. on 5.4.99.

The Mandala Abishekam commences the next day on Tuesday, 6th April and continues till 23.5.99.

For further information and details contact the temple on 0181 393 8147 or 0181 542 5803 or 01622 693938.

Thanuja's Bharata Natya Arangetram

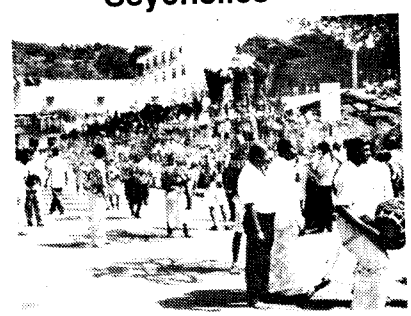
Thanuja, *daughter of Mr & Mrs S.Thanabalasunderam of Zurich, Switzerland had her Bharata Natya Arangetram on 13"' February 1999 at the Hotel Kronenhof Auditorium, Zurich.*

Thanuja commenced her programme with the traditional Mallari followed by Thodaya Mangalam, Jatiswaram and the Vamam 'Sakuje' in Anandabairavi Ragam. This item being the central and most important one, took about fifty minutes to perform. Unlike in the good old days, the audience nowadays is not prepared to sit through lengthy programmes. To everyone's amazement there was complete silence in the hall and when the Vamam finished, the dancer was greeted with a loud and lengthy applause, which indicates that people still do appreciate long classical dances!

After the interval, 'Meenakshi Kalyanam' in Ragamalikai, 'Kuyile' in Yamunakalani Ragam and the Thillana in Hamsanandi Ragam were noteworthy and well received by the audience.

Thanuja is a disciple of Smt Gnanasunderi Vasan, a product of the Ramanathan Academy University of Jafflia and director of 'Radha Nadanalaya', Zurich. She was ably supported by Natya Kalaimani Gnanasunderi Vasan - Nattuvangam, Ganabooshanam Ambika Thamotheram - Vocal, Sangithabooshanam Komala Kandiah- Violin, Nathamani Muthu Sivarajah - Mirdangam and S.Jegatheesan- Ganjira.

Kavadi Festival in Seychelles



The Annual Kavadi Festival of the Navasakthi Vinayagar Temple in Seychelles was celebrated on 31st January, Thai Poosam day, with great piety, pomp and pageantry. The day being a Sunday drew large crowds of tourists and the local residents to get a full view of this rare festival in this part of the world The crowds along the route of the procession in the city centre watched with awe and admiration the Kavadi carrying devotees dancing to the tune of the Nathaswaram music and the Bajan singing ladies in multicoloured sarees carrying Paticudarns (pots of milk) resting on their heads. The entire route which was tastefully decorated and the coloured illuminations transformed the festival into an almost national cultural show.

This festival for the seventh year in succession in Seychelles had more devotees taking part in the different Kavadis and Patkudams and the festival was rounded off at noon with a free lunch to more than five hundred in the temple hall. The popular and glamorous festival which was telecast over the State Broadcasting Corporation had numerous interested viewers.

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